THE ULTIMATE MUSIC GUIDE

LENNON

80TH BIRTHDAY EDITION

YOKO ON JOHN

HIS TOP 30 SONGS

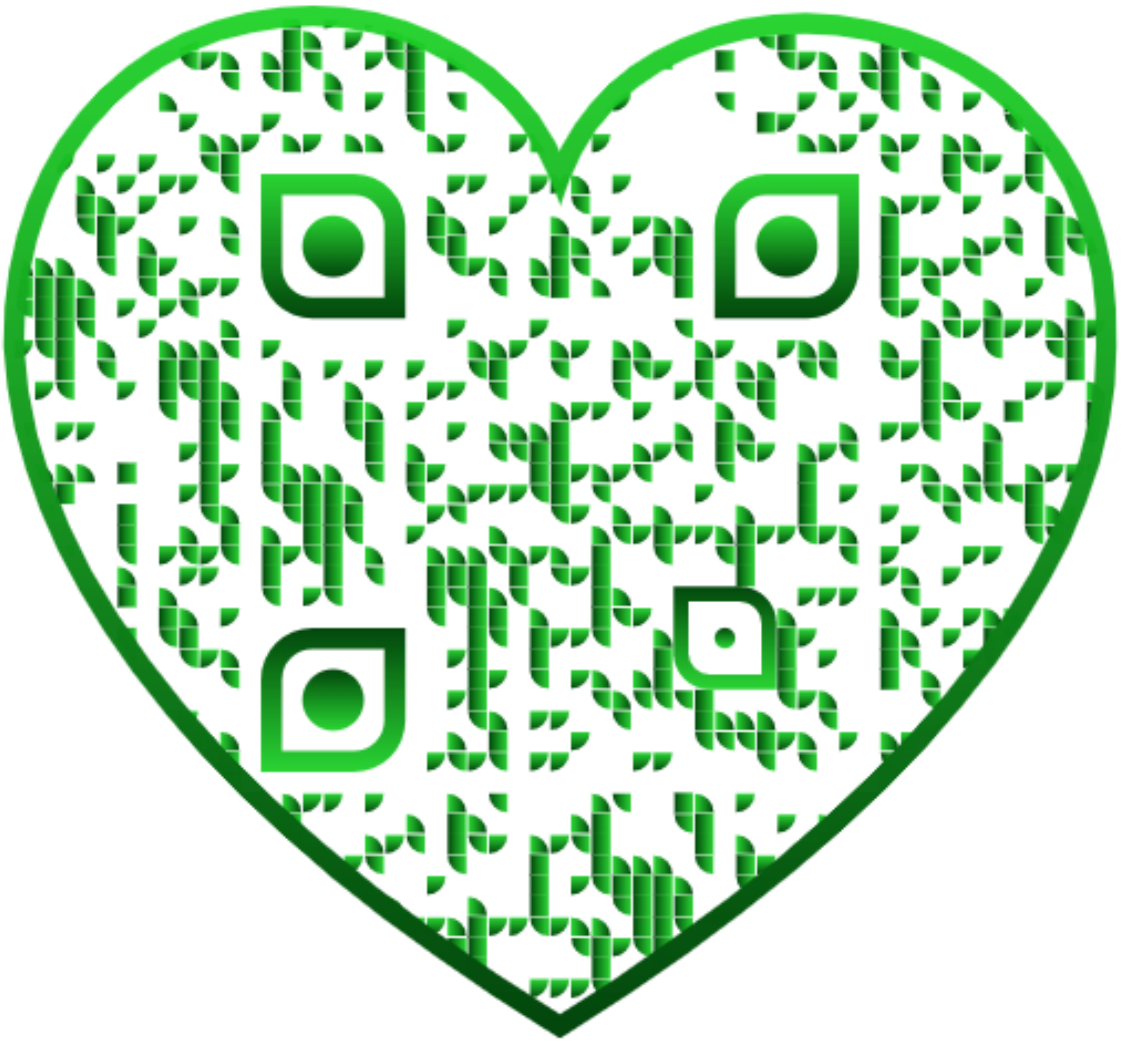
INSIDE THE NEW BOXSETS

CLASSIC INTERVIEWS

EVERY ALBUM REVIEWED IN DEPTH

GIMME SOME TRUTH
JOHN LENNON:
THE COMPLETE STORY

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**



GIMME SOME TRUTH!

THIS DELUXE, REMASTERED edition of the *Ultimate Music Guide* arrives with you on October 8, to celebrate what would have been John Lennon's 80th birthday on October 9. Lennon's tragedy, and ours, is that he never got to celebrate it, his life senselessly cut off in its prime.

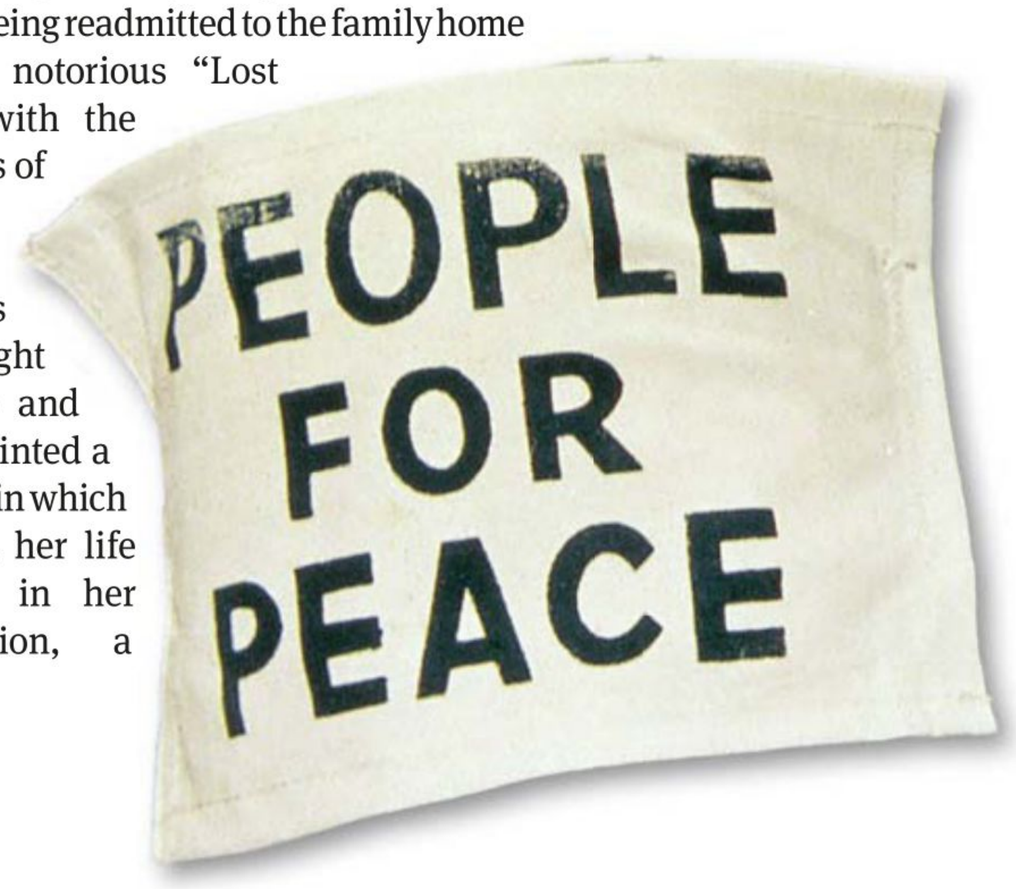
Neil Spencer, *NME*'s editor in 1980, recently told me how the paper responded to the news. Lennon was murdered on the Monday, with news reaching him in London early on Tuesday morning. It was *NME*'s press day, but there was still enough time to act. ("It gave us the opportunity to be journalists," he said.) After a tearful drive up the M1 to the printers in Kettering, Spencer and supporting staff collated their coverage. A report from Joe Stevens in New York. A piece on Lennon's musical journey by Roy Carr. A précis of Lennon's last interview. On a typewriter at the printers, meanwhile, staffer Charles Shaar Murray ("saving the day as he often did") wrote a personal reaction. The headline on the cover was "War Is Over, If You Want It".

Peace and love were Lennon's key messages and as the days passed, Neil used them as the cornerstone of the obituary printed the following week in the paper's Christmas issue. A meditation on Lennon's life but also unselfconsciously on how life might be lived, it reflected on how Lennon's lesson was to find an honourable course and try to stick to it.

Lennon certainly wasn't perfect, but his honesty and his conviction, Spencer wrote, would live on after him. "Like most of us he was often selfish and unpleasant, but he was never miserly with himself or his soul, at least not in the latter part of his life. He gave. He shared. And now he's gone, we too seem diminished. The part of us that responded to the man's essential goodness, his dignity, his openness, and his optimism will be that much more difficult to locate without him around."

Neil concluded by saying Lennon would come to be judged as one of the great men of his age. You'll already instinctively feel how his music has helped change the way we live, and aspires through the work of his family to change it even further. As you'll read in the following pages, though, this was no premeditated, PR-d path to sainthood – Lennon always gave reporters from *NME* and *Melody Maker* the opportunity to be journalists. The candour and generosity of spirit which filled his music was a quality he extended to all those who met with him, and as you'll discover here, it was through a voluble and often humorous treatment of even the most serious issues in the world – and in his life. A case in point might be the interview he gives in 1975 to promote the *Rock'n'Roll* album, in which he discusses being readmitted to the family home with Yoko after his notorious "Lost Weekend" not just with the writer, but with dozens of regional disc jockeys on a party line call.

These archive gems offer a priceless insight into Lennon, his life and music. We've also reprinted a 2003 *Uncut* cover story, in which Yoko recalls in detail her life with John. It was, in her memorable description, a "beautiful miracle".



RON HOWARD/REDFERNS

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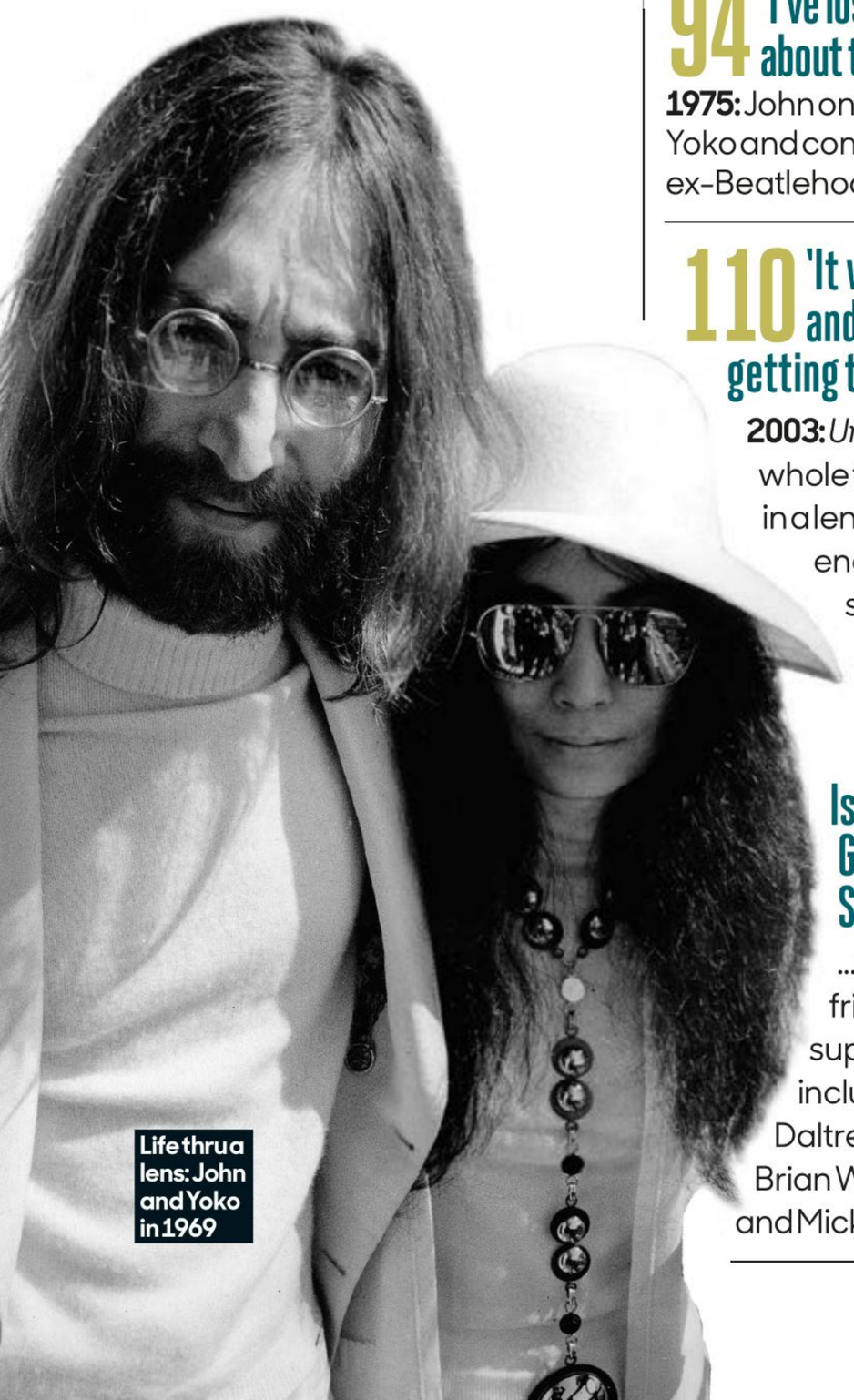
GIMME SOME TRUTH!

Throughout this issue, you'll find little boxes like this, packed with the very finest Lennon facts. Let's start with this: the first self-written song that Lennon recorded was "Cry For A Shadow" – a co-write with George – on June 22, 1961. The last was "Dear John", recorded in November 1980


Life thru a lens: John and Yoko in 1969

VOTAVA/IMAGNO/GETTY IMAGES

A laidback Lennon at home at Tittenhurst Park, Berkshire, July 1971

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MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

UNFINISHED MUSIC NO 1: TWO VIRGINS

LIFE WITH THE LIONS: UNFINISHED MUSIC NO 2

WEDDING ALBUM

One bored Beatle and his new girlfriend dive headlong into the avant-garde, from the comfort of their own bed.

BY DAVID STUBBS

RELEASE DATES
NOVEMBER 1968-DECEMBER 1969

JOHN LENNON WAS a man, an artist, of great intensity – but that didn't mean he was always serious. At the peak of The Beatles' success, in 1965 at Shea Stadium, you could see in his laughing, wild eyes a realisation of the absurdity, as well as the extent, of Beatlemania. He realised the people were there to see The Beatles and to experience their own hysteria, not really to listen to the group. As he lapsed into mock-Spanish, doubled up with giggles and strafed the keyboard with his elbow during McCartney's "I'm Down", he seemed like a man already done with being a moptop.

By 1967, the group had withdrawn to the studio, intent on making music that was to be listened to, not screamed at. Bearded and experienced, they were growing apart, too, with only Paul McCartney trying to hold fast to the rock'n'roll, 'let's-put-on-a-show-lads' spirit that had launched and sustained them in the early days. George Harrison, itching to do more of his own material, broke ranks in 1968 with his solo album, *Wonderwall Music*, released on their well-meaning Apple label. Ringo Starr, feeling unwanted, was the first Beatle to quit the group, albeit briefly, during the 'White Album' sessions.

Lennon, meanwhile, contented himself with a passive-aggressive role within the group. He settled into the role of backseat driver, targeting McCartney – who had assumed team leadership following the death of Brian Epstein – with a waspish wit. Plentiful intake of LSD did not, evidently, dilute his deep-seated cynicism, flippancy and scorn.

And it wasn't just The Beatles who were irritating him; married life to Cynthia was boring Lennon, too. In November 1966, he found himself at the Indica Gallery in London, drawn into conversation with a Japanese artist, seven years his senior, called Yoko Ono. Ono was loosely affiliated to the Fluxus movement, a New York multimedia arts collective founded by the Lithuanian George Maciunas. Fluxus was influenced by the philosophy of

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

UNFINISHED MUSIC NO 1: TWO VIRGINS

1 | Two Virgins – Side 1 ★★★
2 | Two Virgins – Side 2 ★★★

1997 REISSUE BONUS TRACK

3 | Remember Love ★★★

- **Released:** November 29, 1968
- **Produced by:** John Lennon and Yoko Ono
- **Recorded:** May 19, 1968
- **Highest chart position:** UK N/A; US 124

UNFINISHED MUSIC NO 2: LIFE WITH THE LIONS

1 | Cambridge ★★★
2 | No Bed For Beatle John ★★★
3 | Baby's Heartbeat ★★
4 | Two Minutes Silence ★★
5 | Radio Play ★★★

1997 REISSUE BONUS TRACKS

6 | Song For John ★★★
7 | Mulberry ★★

- **Released:** May 9, 1969
- **Produced by:** John Lennon and Yoko Ono
- **Recorded:** November 1968, March 2, 1969
- **Chart position:** UK N/A; US 174

WEDDING ALBUM

1 | John & Yoko ★★
2 | Amsterdam ★★★

1997 REISSUE BONUS TRACKS

3 | Who Has Seen The Wind? ★★
4 | Listen, The Snow Is Falling ★★
5 | Don't Worry Kyoko (Mummy's Only Looking For Her Hand In The Snow) (demo) ★★★

- **Released:** November 7, 1969
- **Produced by:** John Lennon, Yoko Ono and Phil Spector
- **Recorded** Late March and April 22 & 27, 1969
- **Chart position:** UK N/A; US 178

"When two great Saints meet it is a humbling exper
Unfinished Music No. 1. Two Virgins. Yoko Ono/Joh
WEDDING
ALBUM

composer John Cage and the Dada movement of the early 20th Century, whose "happenings" they emulated. Indeed, now-elderly Dadaists decried Fluxus for creating work out of a comfort zone, highlighting how the savagery of World War I had provided the context for their own early work.

Lennon might reasonably have been expected to ridicule Ono's work – preoccupied as it was with whiteness, space, conceptual simplicity and an almost infantile idealism. Especially given how he had long decried intellectual contrivance and once said that "avant-garde is French for bullshit". Instead, he fell utterly in love with her.

Their relationship transcended romance and entered a realm of utter mutual absorption. It was as if he didn't just want to be Ono's lover, but to be utterly at one with her, even be her; "She's me in drag," he once said. Lennon saw her as spiriting him back to his pre-Beatles days, wiping that whole slate clean. Perhaps in some way she also filled the space in his life left by his late mother and muse Julia, for whom he still desperately pined. They were more than a couple, they were a spiritual merger.

As such, it was quite logical for Yoko Ono to accompany Lennon to the studios for the *Let It Be* sessions; a doomed last effort instigated by McCartney to get The Beatles back in the same room as a rock'n'roll group. Her presence only exacerbated the tensions of The Beatles' final months, and although they managed to salvage great work from that period, Lennon remarked that when McCartney sang the words, "*Get back to where you once belonged*," he glowered at Yoko.

The foundation of Apple was the cue for John and Yoko to realise their personal, idealistic and artistic project. Lennon had dumped Maharishi Mahesh Yogi as his guru, but still wanted to espouse the idealism so intoxicatingly expressed on "All You Need Is Love". At a time when the world – and even the counterculture – was becoming more violent and complex, Lennon went in the opposite direction altogether. "*It's easy*," he declared, and together they homebrewed a pacifist philosophy which drew its strength and character from their mutual love. A paradoxical mix of universal idealism and self-absorption, and an assertion of independence from The Beatles and all the chaos they had come to represent.

SUSAN WOOD/GETTY IMAGES

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

"Yoko launches into a continuous, wordless wail which manages to elicit a stream of reactions – hearty laughter, anger, irritation, boredom, bewilderment and final satisfaction..." *Melody Maker Pop Panel, May 17, 1969*

"There are lots of scratchy noises and a phone call by John to Anthea at Ambassador 5973. Maybe you could call her to find out what this is all about..." *Allen Evans, NME, May 17, 1969*

UNFINISHED MUSIC NO 1: Two Virgins was recorded at Lennon's home studio at Kenwood in May 1968. The cover depicted Lennon and Yoko naked and innocent as Adam and Eve, and inevitably drew a mixture of shocked censure and unkindness: Ringo Starr, for example, thought the couple were unwise to expose their multitude of physical sins.

Although its tracks are subdivided, *Two Virgins* is essentially one long piece, mixing snatches of home conversation with whistle, patter, fretboard meandering, piano and tape looped effects, occasionally reminiscent of the earliest such experiments conducted by the French composer Pierre Schaeffer in the late 1940s. There are occasional irreverent silly voices, and snatches of staid old gramophone crooning. It lacks the concentrated, layered nightmarishness of "Revolution No 9", and in some ways reflects the desultory mindset of its makers – happily bed-bound, and refusing to go anywhere, or even get up. A film accompanying the music, by William Wareing, shows superimposed, slow-motion images of John and Yoko blissfully kissing. A countercultural revolution, with French students laying siege to Paris, seemed like the last thing on their minds.

1969's *Unfinished Music No 2: Life With The Lions* was made in more difficult circumstances, with the couple under intense media scrutiny and coming to terms with Yoko's miscarriage: part of

Yoko and John circa '68: *"In the middle of the bath I call your name..."*

the album was even recorded in their suite at Queen Charlotte's hospital in London in 1968. The first side, however, is a recording made in Cambridge in 1969. Here, Yoko unleashes a sustained and on first impact utterly disconcerting variation on her usual shriek – a child's cry, as if channelling the pain of her lost baby. Lennon accompanies on feedback, boldly but without demonstrating any of the talent of a Hendrix as a sculptor in this medium. It's only when seasoned avant-garde musicians John Tchicai (saxophone) and John Stevens join in towards the end of the piece that it achieves any sort of gradient or intensity.

Side Two features the conceptually amusing "No Bed For Beatle John", in which John and Yoko incant, a cappella-style, press clippings about themselves. The rest of the album is a homage of sorts to John Cage. "Two Minutes Silence" takes its cue from his "4'33", but is less a meditation on what "silence" means in music, more a simple act of mourning for their lost child and a broken world. Finally, "Radio Play" sees Lennon playing with a radio dial, blipping around the airwaves: less impressive than Stockhausen's *Hymnen*, made about the same time, which uses the same methods to more magisterial effect. There's even a bit of self-reference – The Beatles' "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" is one of the songs broadcast on the wireless.

Wedding Album, though, goes even further into John and Yoko's shared solipsism – so much so that you almost feel like an intruder listening to it. On the opening track, "John & Yoko", the bed of sound is sourced from recordings of their own heartbeats, over which they call across to one another, with growing and ebbing anxiety, passion and bliss, as if they're the only two people on the planet. Side Two comprises the track "Amsterdam", in which Lennon gives an effective rebuttal to those who poured scorn on his and Yoko's "Bed-In" in Amsterdam and his pacifism in general. "There's many ways to protest . . . peace is only got by peaceful methods. The establishment knows how to play the game of violence. They can't han dle peaceful humour." He's also honest enough, though, to point to his own contradictions: "I'm as violent as the next man. Me and Yoko, we're violent people. I prefer myself when I'm non-violent."

As The Beatles unravelled, Lennon and Ono's glut of creative activity was not limited to music. In September 1969, they exhibited a selection of their films at the ICA in London. These included Yoko's 1967 film *Four*, better known as *Bottoms*, in which 364 participants in the swinging London scene were asked to expose their rear ends to camera; and *Self Portrait*, a 42-minute film of John's semi-erect penis. The evening was not a success.

More ambitious was the 75-minute *Rape*, in which a young Hungarian actress is harassed through the streets of London by cameraman Nick Knowland. It was purported to be a metaphor for the personal harassment felt by John and Yoko which, just as inappropriately, they declared to be of a piece with the sufferings then being endured in Biafra and Vietnam.

Far from helping publicise an underground world of the avant-garde, Lennon's dabblings may inadvertently have given it a bad name. Critics who had never before been exposed to tape loops, radio waves, *musique concrète* and so on, had their prejudices confirmed by albums like *Two Virgins*. The writer Richard Williams, then working for *Melody Maker*, reviewed the blank sides of a faulty test pressing of *The Wedding Album*, assuming them to be sound exercises in maintaining a single tone. Lennon, in truth, was far more adept at creating fuzzy, scabrous rock'n'roll than he was in the realms of experimental noise: he achieves more in the harrowing few minutes of "Cold Turkey", another 1969 release, than he does on all of these three albums. But there's a further twist. It was McCartney, not Lennon, who had first taken a serious interest in the experimental music scene of the 1960s, prompted by his journalist friend Barry Miles to attend a concert by the ultra-free improv group AMM. It had been McCartney who told Lennon all about John Cage's use of radio transmission as music, which had prompted Lennon to indulge in a bit of dial play on the fadeout to "I Am The Walrus".

These are avant-garde gestures, rather than sustained works, and stand as testimony to John and Yoko's togetherness

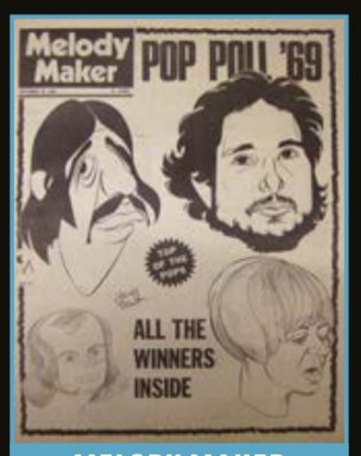
The crucial difference, though, is that while taking an intelligent interest in such music, McCartney did not try and make it himself. We can laugh now at the primness of '60s distributors who insisted that *Two Virgins*' cover be concealed by a brown paper bag. But today, it's hard to think of a superstar who would try to pull off an equivalent stunt. Lennon's experimental albums are best regarded as gestures, rather than sustained works; gestures of an idealism we're supposedly too clever to embrace in the 21st Century.

The avant-garde turned out to be just one more phase in Lennon's shiftless life – he moved on from the bed-ins and experimental albums to Primal Scream therapy, to political militancy, to domestic bakery and seclusion and to healthy marital bliss. Each phase was short-lived, the latter tragically so. But despite the changes and changes of mind Lennon underwent, Yoko Ono was a virtual constant (May Pang and the Lost Weekend notwithstanding). The experimental albums stand as testimony to their extraordinary togetherness.

'I'm not interested in history. I'm interested in now. And the future...'

NME
JUNE 21, 1969

NME
JUNE 28, 1969



MELODY MAKER
SEPTEMBER 20, 1969

No longer a mere Beatle, John Lennon reveals to ALAN SMITH and RICHARD WILLIAMS the full extent of his interests in 1969. Bed-ins! Financial shenanigans with Apple! Art films! Macrobiotic food! And the burning of baby dolls to promote world peace...

GETTY IMAGES/BETTEMAN

» **NME** JUNE 21, 1969

THE SUN BURNS brightly through the Savile Row window and it's a hot and sticky busy day at Apple, with Yoko hammering away at the electric typewriter and John Lennon in conversation, and all the while the beautiful No 1 smash sound of an unreleased Lennon song called "Give Peace A Chance" soaring and thumping around the room. A statement of fact is that this record will sell several million and that, like "All You Need Is Love", it will echo like an anthem across the world.

A pleasant and intriguing Irishman named Cecil McCartney has been in, not to claim some long-forgotten Beatles' relationship, but to talk about war and peace and his loathing for the fiery death they call napalm. Lennon has been inspired and the result is that several hundred plastic children's dolls have been bought and now await mutilation and destruction in a grisly protest burning in London's Kings Road the following day. One of them lies on the table, naked and pink and innocent and with its feeding bottle aloft.

"We're only at the beginning of selling our peace product," John is saying, "and I think and I hope it's beginning to work. Yoko and I can only go on the reactions we get from people when we're going down the streets together – of course. I know we don't get people really against us. Some of them do give us a dirty look, but the others... bus drivers and lorry drivers and that... some of them say 'Ow yer doin?' and 'Good luck,' and all that stuff.

"The way I see it is, even if they don't get the gist of us, or why are those people hammering in nails or staying in bed... they know we're in favour of peace. They know what we stand for. This is only the start of the campaign, and they'll soon all know our message, and what we're trying to say.

"Sure, I know we've been criticised by some papers, but you know, some of these journalists and people talk as if they feel they represent somebody. One journalist might think we need more communication... but that's unfortunate. They must get out of the habit – newspaper men and pop stars, anybody – must talk for themselves. I mean, how does one journalist know how most people feel? OK, so the people in his office might agree with him. But how many straights does he know – how many people that aren't boozy journalists?"

I nod, swigging swiftly at the bottle of whisky I whip from my pocket in a sudden secretive swoop.

"In the same way, I can only judge from my side in that how many straights do I know besides at Apple, or those I meet? I can only judge the reaction I get by people waving or sending me letters. And that happens. Sure, Yoko and I both know the criticisms about us spending £2,000 at the Hilton on a bed-in when we could spend it feeding babies in Biafra. The situation is, I've done that, as well – the charity bit. And I respect the sentiments behind charity, and I will continue to do things like that. But it doesn't solve the problem.

"It's like nursing the cancer after somebody's got it. There's a lot of cancer to be cured. But it still doesn't stop research. And we look to what we're trying to do for peace as research – to prevent Biafra happening next time. I could give all my money to Biafra, and maybe a few thousand kids would be safe for that day. But the war would still go on. I'm using my money as an overall campaign to advertise the cause of peace.

"You know, these people who criticise... what are they doing? You've got to remember – all of you – that this is me and Yoko's best effort. It's with both of our minds. So if any of you out there can think of a better idea, then we'll do that. But until you come up with an alternative, and not just 'Why don't you give it to the spastics and not to the deaf?' then we'll stick the way we are.

"The thing about trying to bring change is that everybody in the world sits back and blames everybody else. The whole human race is like that. We vote people into parliament to run the government for us, and then we sit back and claim how badly they're doing it. We always use a scapegoat, and the whole system's just like that. Everybody sits in the armchair and says Harold Wilson did this and Harold Wilson did that... but it's our fault, not Harold Wilson's."

He picks up the pink doll and pulls its plastic arm out of the socket, and pauses for a moment and looks at the table and listens as Yoko speaks rapid Japanese into the phone.

"Once," I told him, "you used to frighten the hell out of me. There was a time when I'd expect your next words to be 'You four-eyed git.' Now, I find myself more at ease in your company: you're far more mellow."

He tries to push the doll's arm back into place and he says: "That's because I'm more myself now. I'm introverted and in saying that, it would have been to prevent you saying 'four-eyed git!' to me. It's just a case of simple games... The Games People Play. It's just that.

I had the game of aggression. Aggression was my defence. As soon as somebody came near me, I'd make the first punch. If they couldn't handle that then maybe I'd be cruel – or maybe I'd be kind. Now, I'm relaxed enough to be myself and be less frightened of what people are going to say. Another thing is, when I didn't wear glasses I used to be more uninhibited. In Hamburg, for instance, when I could never see the audience – I'd just get carried away on my own."

He looks around for a prising instrument and then he puts down the baby's arm and takes hold of the feeding bottle, and then he tries to jam the bottle into the empty armpit. He doesn't say anything, but he gets it in in the end – one arm, one feeding bottle.

"The thing about performing now is," he says, "we still just don't agree on it. We're just four middle-aged teenagers, who don't agree on it. We're all professional musicians, sure, but musicians aren't necessarily performers. I mean, I'd go out. But you're talking to me, and The Beatles as such don't want to go out on the road. I don't mind... having a bed-in is being out on the road as far as I'm concerned. I think George and Ringo don't really fancy it, but I don't want to point a finger at them and say they're the reason. Maybe there's also a little something inside me saying the same thing.

"Singing in front of an audience and playing, I'd enjoy. But the rest of it all... that's the problem. Maybe in 10 years... like Elvis... who knows."

He takes hold of the spare arm and he pulls it and presses it and moulds it to a pliable plastic. "I'm happy with life," he answers me, "as happy as anybody can be. The only blots are violence and war and starvation and all that. You can't be happy with all that going on.

"If I have a good percentage of happiness, it's because I'm grateful for life, and I'm in love and

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

An estimated 150 journalists visited John and Yoko's room daily during their week-long Bed-In at Room 1742 of Montreal's Queen Elizabeth Hotel. John even composed "Give Peace A Chance" in bed, recording it on June 1, 1969 with a chorus of fans and celebrities including Allen Ginsberg and Petula Clark

Bed-In at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, Montreal, May 1969

I'm happy with my wife and I thank God for it. And all that bit. In fighting and doing my bit for peace, I don't believe that thing that man will always fight because it's in his nature. That's just the Establishment, for thousands of years, telling us that.

"They say that because it suits the Establishment, it suits the military, to tell us we're all basically soldiers. We're just as much non-violent as we are violent. It's all that 'be a man, my son' thing we get, and 'you wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for me, my son.' 'I fought'... you know the whole thing.

"I believe you can use music as some sort of a platform to bring people together, but so can you use dancing and painting and even walking and all of the media."

"The thing about trying to bring change is that everybody in the world sits back and blames everybody else..."

Musically, adds John Lennon, The Beatles have more than ever before to say, and they have one album ready and another one half-ready.

"The Beatles' album that's ready is like an unfinished rehearsal for that show that we never did. It's The Beatles' show that never was. There's bits of dialogue on it and 'Get Back''s the most finished tune. So you can imagine what some of it's like. We've no date for it yet because there's a book with it and that's not ready yet. There is another album, and that's by John and Yoko – and that's also got a book with it. It's like a wedding album. Ands it's great.

"In all this new Beatles' stuff there's obviously McCartney hits there... and there's one beautiful ballad called 'Let It Be' which is a cert for somebody. A cert. And there's quite a few cert hits on it for other people."

He twists the doll's arm inside out and looks down at it with some satisfaction.

"I think Apple's running much better," he says. "I don't know if you can tell. We're rectifying the past mistakes. Clearing up. It's also been convenient for people to leave at

CONTINUES OVER »

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this time. I like that expression: 'Convenient to leave at this time'.

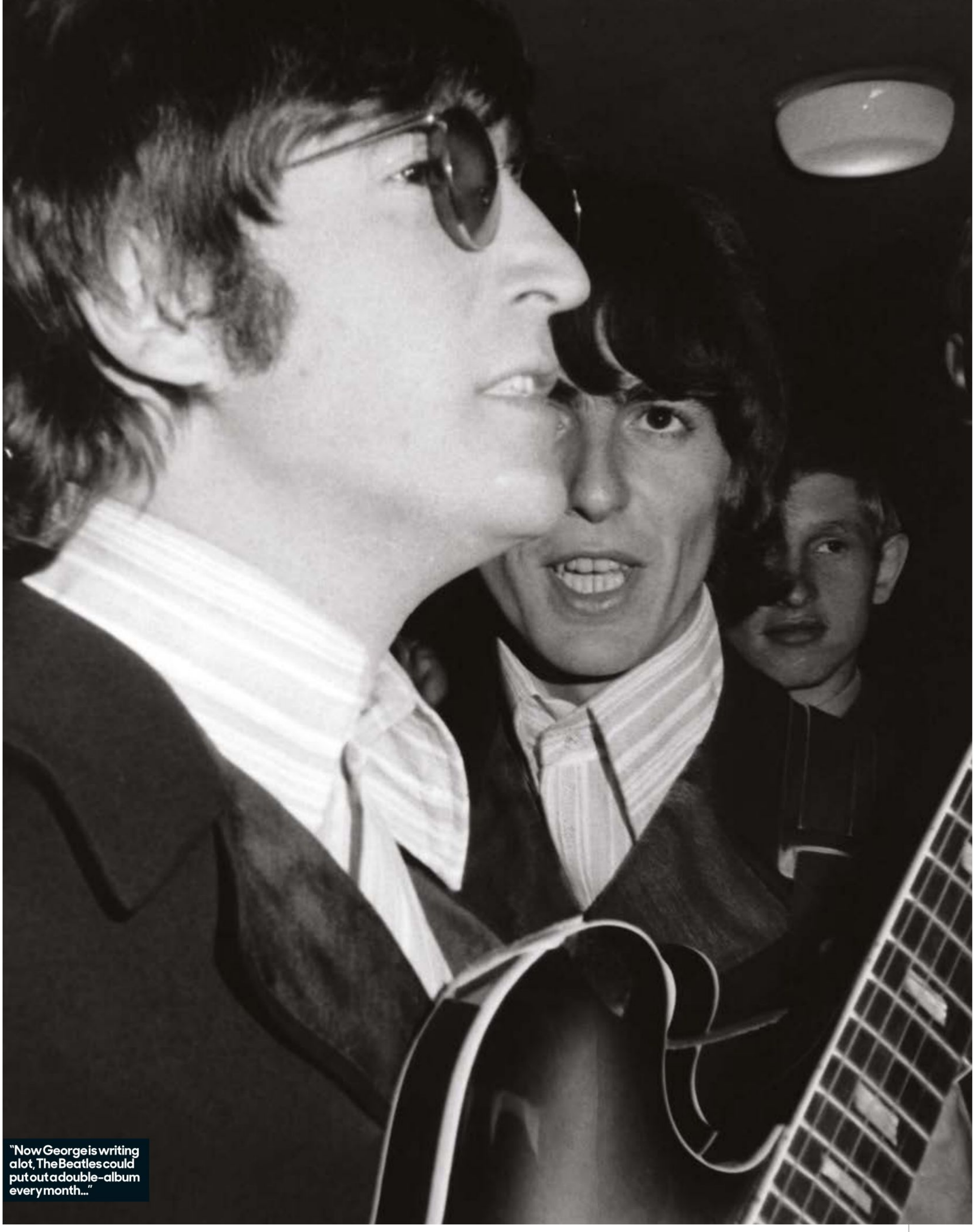
"I'd like Apple to be more commercial – sure. I'd like it to be economically viable. I don't care about respect. We'd still like to attract talent, but we want it to be self-contained and to be able to look after itself. In the past, all we got when we said 'Come to Apple' was people who'd been turned down everywhere else.

"At the moment, there's only really us and Mary Hopkin as names on Apple, although George's done some good stuff with Billy Preston and I think he's got good possibilities."

It's time to go and he smiles warmly and proffers the inside-out doll's arm, with its hand which now faces in the wrong direction. I get the impression he only now appreciates the subconscious havoc he has piled upon it.

"Here," he says, "d'ya want this arm? As a souvenir?"

ALAN SMITH



"Now George is writing a lot, The Beatles could put out a double-album every month..."

» NME JUNE 28, 1969

THESE DAYS, JOHN Lennon is happy to talk but not to drop himself into some new, fresh drag of a controversy. And on some topics, he's become pleasantly and likeably evasive in the way that only Paul McCartney has developed to a fine art.

He told me: "There's one film idea we're interested in, but I'm not telling you what it is. There's certainly hope for us doing another film... it's being kicked around. The only reason I don't want to talk is that other people are naturally involved, and I don't want to screw 'em up.

"Anyway, we got a fantastic film out of making our next LP. It really is incredible... just the sweat and strain of four guys making an LP. It's pared down to about four hours. It could make a major movie. About our music, these characters who talk about us progressing, or not, really want to mind their own business! Progressing to what?

"Music is music. All these characters complain about us and Dylan not being progressive, but we're the ones that turned them on to the other stuff – so let 'em take our word for it. This is music, baby.

"When we feel like changing, then fine. It's the same with this other half-album we're into, the one after the next. This'll probably please the critics a bit more, because we got a bit tired of being sort of just strumming along for ever. We got a bit into production again.

"I tell you, this next Beatles album but one is really something. So tell the armchair people to hold their tongues and wait. 'Shut up and listen,' that's the answer. And remember...there can be just as much complexity in one note as there can be in any symphony or *Sergeant Pepper*.

"Not that I'm interested in classical music – I think it's history, and I'm not interested in history, only as a hobby. I'm interested in NOW. And the future."

About America: "I can't disguise that to get my visa back means a lot. A lot. I need to go there, for business at least. I'll just have to keep trying. I know Donovan seems to have been OK about getting his visa back, but he only did a big anti-narcotics thing, didn't he? So there we are.

"Anyway, these days I don't take drugs, alcohol or meat. They all interfere with my head. And that's straight. Or sugar... I think it's all bad. These days, I'm completely macrobiotic. I know it sounds strange, but it's great... and it keeps you high all the time.

"You don't just get high now and then this way... you're permanently high."

ALAN SMITH

» MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 20, 1969

JOHN LENNON HASN'T had a royalty cheque for two years. And, believe it or not, he's feeling the pinch. The man whose group has again been voted top in both the British and International Sections of the *Melody Maker* poll told me that The Beatles' own company, Apple, has become something of a monster which is out of control.

"The problem is that two years ago our accountants made us sign over 80 per cent of our royalties to Apple," he said. "We can't touch any of it, and it's a ridiculous situation. All the money comes into this little building and it never gets out. If I could get my money out of the company I'd split away and start doing my own projects independently. I'd have much more freedom and we'd all be happier. I still feel part of Apple and The Beatles, and there's no animosity, but they tend to ignore Yoko and me.

"For instance, [*Radio 1 DJ*] Kenny Everett recently made a promotional record for

WERNER OTTO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Apple which was played at the big yearly EMI meeting. It plugged James Taylor, The Ivies and so on, but it didn't mention the things Yoko and I had been doing. And I think that what we're doing is a lot more important than James Taylor. Apple seem to be scared of us. They didn't want to have anything to do with our *Two Virgins* film, for instance.

"The Beatles' wealth is all a myth. The only expensive things I've ever owned are my house and cars, and I just haven't got anything else. Don't even break even on the films we make, and that worries me."

I asked John about his recent evening of films at the ICA. [*A selection of John and Yoko's films, including Ono's* Bottoms *and Lennon's Self Portrait, which detailed the rise (and fall) of his penis, were shown at the New Cinema Club, Institute of Contemporary Arts, September 10, 1969.*] Why, for instance, did he feel it necessary to make a film like *Self Portrait*, with its highly controversial content, when Andy Warhol did the same thing years ago with his films *Empire State* and *Sleep*?

"It's not like Warhol at all. He's negative and we're positive. I can't stand negative things, and our attitude is completely different. *Self Portrait* has vibrations of love, and it has an immediate message of humanity.

"When Yoko showed me her *Bottoms* film I thought it was ridiculous, but she explained it to me and I was convinced – I don't remember how. I think it was the humour of the film, and that's what we try to keep in our films. If we're going to get these films shown, we've got to get into the scene. We'd like to make a film that wasn't so underground in concept, but we wouldn't do something like *Barbarella* or *2001* – although that was a lovely trip.

"Films are moving ahead so fast – much faster than music or anything else. We're hoping to have talks with a big production company which I shouldn't name – oh well, why not, it's United Artists – who seem to be interested. We'd like to get on at the West End."

Yoko, who was sitting by John's side, chipped in: "We don't know how to go about it. We're sussing it out at the moment."

John continued: "It's not like films, it's more like TV. Dylan was right – it should be less important. Our films, and The Beatles and Stones albums, shouldn't have so much noise made about them. The process of production is so slow. We'd like to speed the process up, and get a new album and film out every month. For instance, we haven't been able to get our *Wedding* film out yet. And the trouble is that people will say we copied Jane Birkin on one track, but we didn't. It's just that we couldn't get ours out fast enough.

"Most of our films are like portraits. For instance, *Smile* is simply a portrait of me sending out love vibrations to Yoko, who's on the other end of the camera. People say it's boring, but they'll look at Van Gogh which doesn't move at all, and they'll have it on their walls."

I suggested that perhaps the audience at the ICA had been dissatisfied because the environment was wrong.

"Yes, it would probably be best if people had the film at home and could show it on their walls and look at it when they felt like it. The ICA night was too long – but they asked for five hours of film and that's what I gave them."

Wasn't the work of John and Yoko coming to resemble an open diary, I asked? And don't most people keep their diaries in their desks at home?

"Yes, but who doesn't like to read other people's diaries?" he replied. "That's exactly what it is – but you must realise that the Beatles albums, and Dylan's for that matter, are all diaries. We're just bringing it out into the open and making it more honest."

Does this theory inevitably lead to disposable works of art?

"Yes, that's what we're aiming at," said John. "Yoko's having her book of poetry, *Grapefruit*, reprinted and at the end there's an instruction to the reader to eat the book."

Yoko added: "When you keep things they become tombstones. The world would be clogged up with useless objects."

Have they any new ideas for their well-publicised campaign for peace?

"There's this Peace Ship plan," said John, "which is very strange because I recently read a book which contained almost exactly the same idea. There was this bloke in a white ship from which he broadcast peace messages, and then when I'd read the book a real guy came to me with the plan for doing it. Someone's also given me some ideas for doing things in Nigeria and Biafra, but I can't talk about it at the moment."

Does this suggest a more direct involvement with war and peace?

"Not really, because I think that what we've done already, like staying in bed for peace, has been very direct. It wouldn't do any good, for instance, if I was to go to Vietnam and get shot. That proves nothing, but it's what people are always telling me to do. We're after people's minds. If we go to see Nixon for instance, it wouldn't make him down tools but we think we could find out what he thinks and tell other people. We'd know where he was at.

"You can't change anything by violence. You have to be aggressive, that's part of everyone and I'm aggressive, but we have the machinery to challenge it. We don't have to get involved in other people's games, and I think that all the killers should be allowed to take their tanks into the desert and kill each other off. But I don't want any part of it, and we've got the power to do something about it."

With two albums in the can, *Abbey Road* and *Get Back* [*sic*] – would there now be a lull in The Beatles' recording schedule?

"The trouble is that we've got too much material. Now that George is writing a lot we could put out a double-album every month, but they're so difficult to produce. After *Get Back* is recorded in January, we'll probably go back into the studio and record another one.

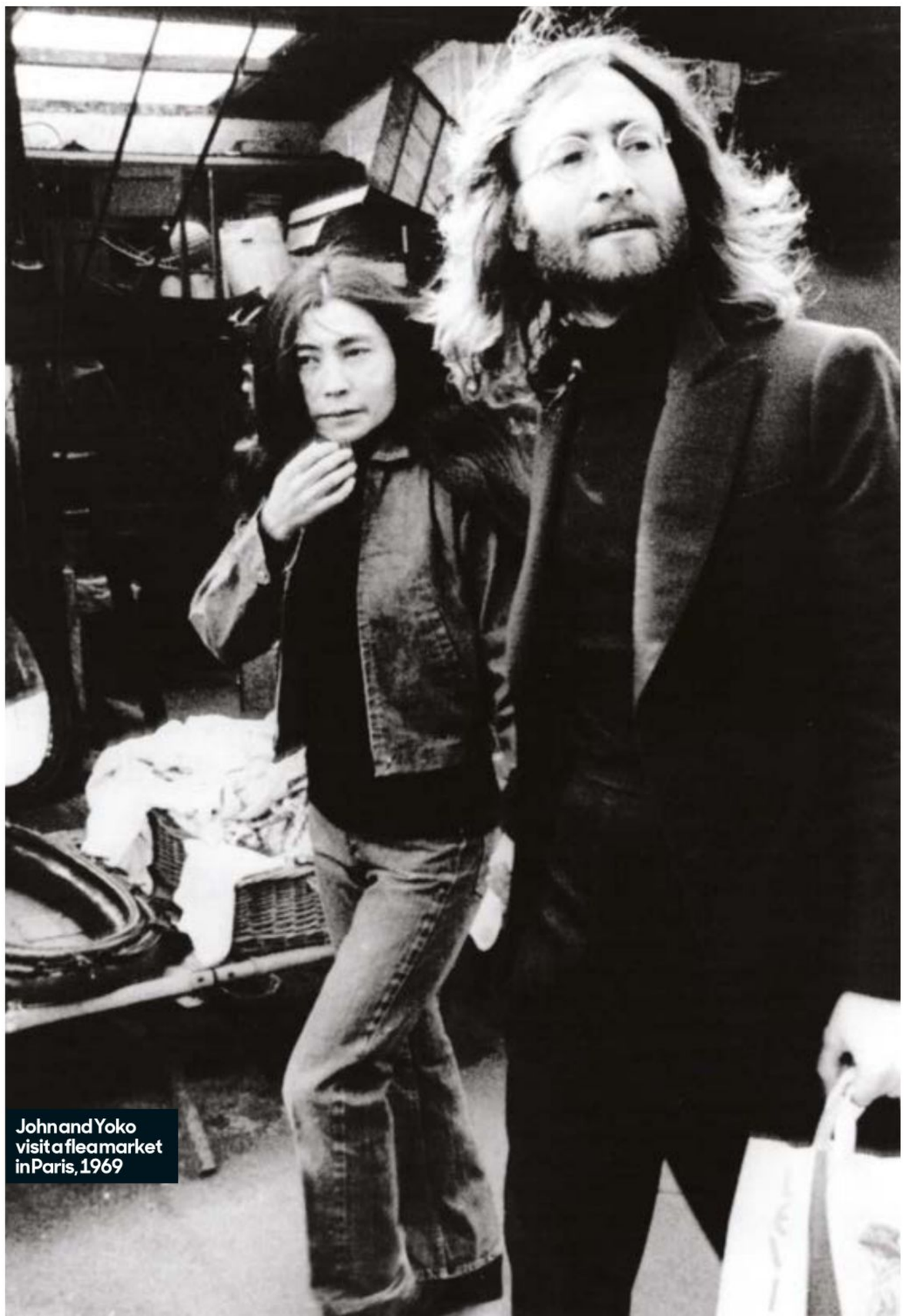
"It's just a shame we can't get more albums out faster."

RICHARD WILLIAMS

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

Lennon's comments regarding Apple Corps' shambolic finances in this very *MM* article prompted Stones manager Allen Klein to contact the band, offering assistance. The subsequent hiring of Klein, which McCartney vehemently opposed, was a major catalyst in The Beatles' split

"I still feel part of Apple and The Beatles, and there's no animosity, but they tend to ignore Yoko and me..."



John and Yoko visit a flea market in Paris, 1969

EVERETT COLLECTION INC/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

LIVE PEACE IN TORONTO 1969

The Plastic Ono Band is born on a plane, as Lennon returns to live rock'n'roll with Eric, Klaus, Alan White — and Yoko in a bag

BY DAVID CAVANAGH

RELEASE DATE
12 DECEMBER 1969

WE DON'T USUALLY associate Kim Fowley with the Peace Movement. The Machiavellian brain behind "Nut Rocker" and The Runaways would be too drawn to the dark side, you'd think, to ever consider endorsing a statement like "Give peace a chance!" But on September 13, 1969, in front of 20,000 people in a Toronto football stadium, Fowley exclaimed those very words – twice – as he welcomed John Lennon and the Plastic Ono Band to the stage. *Live Peace In Toronto 1969* is the extraordinary document of what followed. If Fowley was winging it, he wasn't the only one.

Live Peace In Toronto 1969 is an action movie of the utmost simplicity. Phonecall. Aeroplane. Limousine. Stage. It's a souvenir of a band that has never played together before, and never will again. The singer hasn't performed in public for three years (unless you count a recent escapade on a roof) and, to make things interesting, he's trying desperately to stay off heroin. His wife is onstage, too, but – and it's a small but crucial point – she's hidden inside a bag. And the impressive thing about *Live Peace In Toronto 1969* is that it doesn't try to sidestep or spin any of this. It's the *vérité* footage of a unique event and it takes place in real time, for better or worse. No edits. No post-production. No cheating.

The phonecall was made to Apple in London on either September 11 or 12. It came from Toronto, where a one-day festival – the Toronto Rock'n'Roll Revival – was to be staged at the Varsity Stadium on September 13. Showcasing the original rock'n'roll giants of 1956–7, the festival was predicated on an ardour for the past, but proved years ahead of its time. Nostalgia for soda pops and high-school hops hadn't yet swept North America, and although the promoters had booked some once-legendary names (Chuck Berry, Gene Vincent, Little Richard), ticket sales were disastrous. They called Lennon, a renowned fan of early rock'n'roll, and asked if he would fly over, introduce a few acts, drum up some publicity and save the day. The request so excited Lennon, he insisted on performing . The

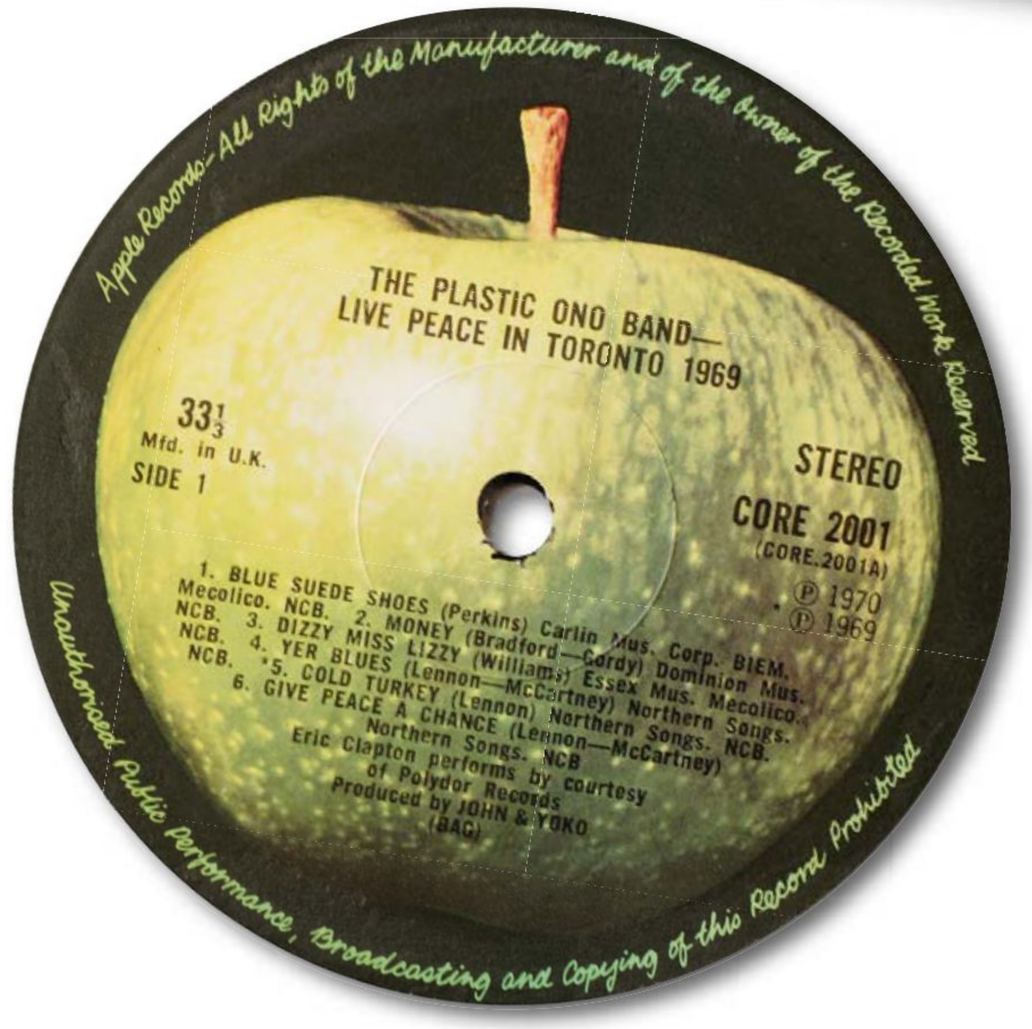
CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 | Blue Suede Shoes ★★★★
2 | Money ★★★★
3 | Dizzy Miss Lizzy ★★★
4 | Yer Blues ★★★
5 | Cold Turkey ★★★★
6 | Give Peace A Chance ★★★
7 | Don't Worry Kyoko ★★★★
8 | John John (Let's Hope For Peace) ★★★

- **Released:** December 12, 1969
- **Produced by:** John & Yoko
- **Recorded at:** Toronto Rock'n'Roll Revival Festival (September 13, 1969)
- **Personnel:** John Lennon (vocals, rhythm guitar); Eric Clapton (lead guitar); Klaus Voormann (bass guitar); Alan White (drums); Yoko Ono (vocals)
- **Highest chart position:** UK N/A; US 10

THE PLASTIC ONO BAND-LIVE PEACE IN TORONTO 1969
BLUE SUEDE SHOES
MONEY
DIZZY MISS LIZZIE
YER BLUES
COLD TURKEY
GIVE PEACE A CHANCE
DON'T WORRY KYOKO
(Mummy's only looking
for her hand in the snow)
JOHN, JOHN (Let's hope for peace)
JOHN LENNON Guitar, Vocals
YOKO ONO Vocals
ERIC CLAPTON Guitar
KLAUS VOORMAN Bass Guitar
ALAN WHITE Drums
PRODUCED BY JOHN AND YOKO (BAG PRODUCTIONS)
'BEING BORN IN SCOTLAND CARRIES WITH IT CERTAIN RESPONSIBILITIES' - DEREK TAYLOR


Apple Records - All Rights of the Manufacturer and of the Owner of the Recorded Works Reserved
THE PLASTIC ONO BAND—
LIVE PEACE IN TORONTO 1969
33 1/3
Mfd. in U.K.
SIDE 1
STEREO
CORE 2001
(CORE.2001A)
℗ 1970
℗ 1969
1. BLUE SUEDE SHOES (Perkins) Carlin Mus. Corp. BIEM.
Mecolico. NCB. 2. MONEY (Bradford—Gordy) Dominion Mus.
NCB. 3. DIZZY MISS LIZZY (Williams) Essex Mus. Mecolico.
NCB. 4. YER BLUES (Lennon—McCartney) Northern Songs.
NCB. *5. COLD TURKEY (Lennon) Northern Songs. NCB.
6. GIVE PEACE A CHANCE (Lennon—McCartney)
Northern Songs. NCB
Eric Clapton performs by courtesy
of Polydor Records
Produced by JOHN & YOKO
(BAG)
Unauthorised Public Performance, Broadcasting and Copying of this Record Prohibited

Plastic Ono Band were added to the bill.

The aeroplane left Heathrow on the afternoon of September 13. Lennon had rounded up Eric Clapton (lead guitar), Klaus Voormann (bass) and a young drummer, Alan White, whom he'd noticed playing with a band called Griffin literally the night before. The travelling party, which included Allen Klein and Beatles go-to guy Mal Evans, rendezvoused in Heathrow's VIP lounge. Yoko arrived on John's arm – everyone expected that – but nobody seemed clear about her role in the group, or whether she had one. The musicians boarded their flight. Alan White later recalled: "We talked about what we were going to play and we rehearsed on the plane. In mid-air we became the Plastic Ono Band."

Outside The Beatles, the key Lennon song of the period was "Give Peace A Chance", the Plastic Ono Band's singalong summer hit, recorded in a Toronto hotel room in June and still enjoying a prosperous chart-life in September. Lennon had written the follow-up, "Cold Turkey", an account of a junkie's withdrawal from heroin, but the song was so new that only Yoko was privy to it. "Give Peace A Chance" and "Cold Turkey" were two numbers Lennon particularly wanted the Plastic Ono Band to play at the festival, even if Clapton, Voormann and White hadn't been involved in recording the former, and had never heard the latter. Finding a row of empty seats at the back of the aircraft, Lennon guided Clapton through the rudiments of "Cold Turkey", strumming unplugged guitars while Voormann (from Hamburg) and White (from Durham), who found it impossible to understand each other's accents, accompanied them on bass guitar and drumsticks-on-knees. It was agreed that "Yer Blues", from the 'White Album', would be appropriate for the show, as would three undemanding oldies ("Blue Suede Shoes", "Money", "Dizzy Miss Lizzy"). However, Mal Evans advised Lennon not to tackle "Come Together" or "I Want You (She's So Heavy)", whose rhythm section parts were a little more complicated.

That made six songs. A cosy little 20 minutes. The plane flew implacably onwards towards Canada. One imagines a "Jazz Odyssey" moment as the Plastic Ono Band looked at each other and realised that the remainder of their set would have to be given over to avant-garde extemporisations by Yoko.

WE JOIN *Live Peace In Toronto 1969* as a man's voice is gently cajoling, "Get your matches ready." This is Kim Fowley, the emcee. Lennon, backstage, is in a highly nervous state. He's wearing the same white suit that he'll soon make famous on the front of *Abbey Road* (released September 26). It's as though he reached the end of the pedestrian crossing, turned west and kept going. Lennon's nerves have not been helped by an argument at Toronto International Airport's immigration desk, nor by a high-speed limo ride into town, pursued by bikers. To soften his landing, Fowley has asked the audience to light matches and hold them aloft. Lennon's long-awaited return to the stage will be illuminated, poetic and beautiful. In an instant, a new rock concert ritual is born.

Fowley then introduces "The Plastic! Ono! Band!" – perhaps he's been quietly warned not to mention Lennon by name – and we hear the bumps, buzzes and crackles of instruments being picked up, plugged in and tuned. Lennon bids the crowd "Good evening!" in a *Not Only... But Also* voice. His guitar tears out a few notes of a riff reminiscent of the slide-blues song ("I'm Yours, She's Mine") which began The Rolling Stones' set at Hyde Park in July. We're now 90 seconds into the album. Lennon steps up to the microphone: "OK, we're just gonna do numbers that we know, y'know, because we've never played together before, and..." His apology tails off. The audience erupt in cheers, roars. They're clearly thrilled to see him back.

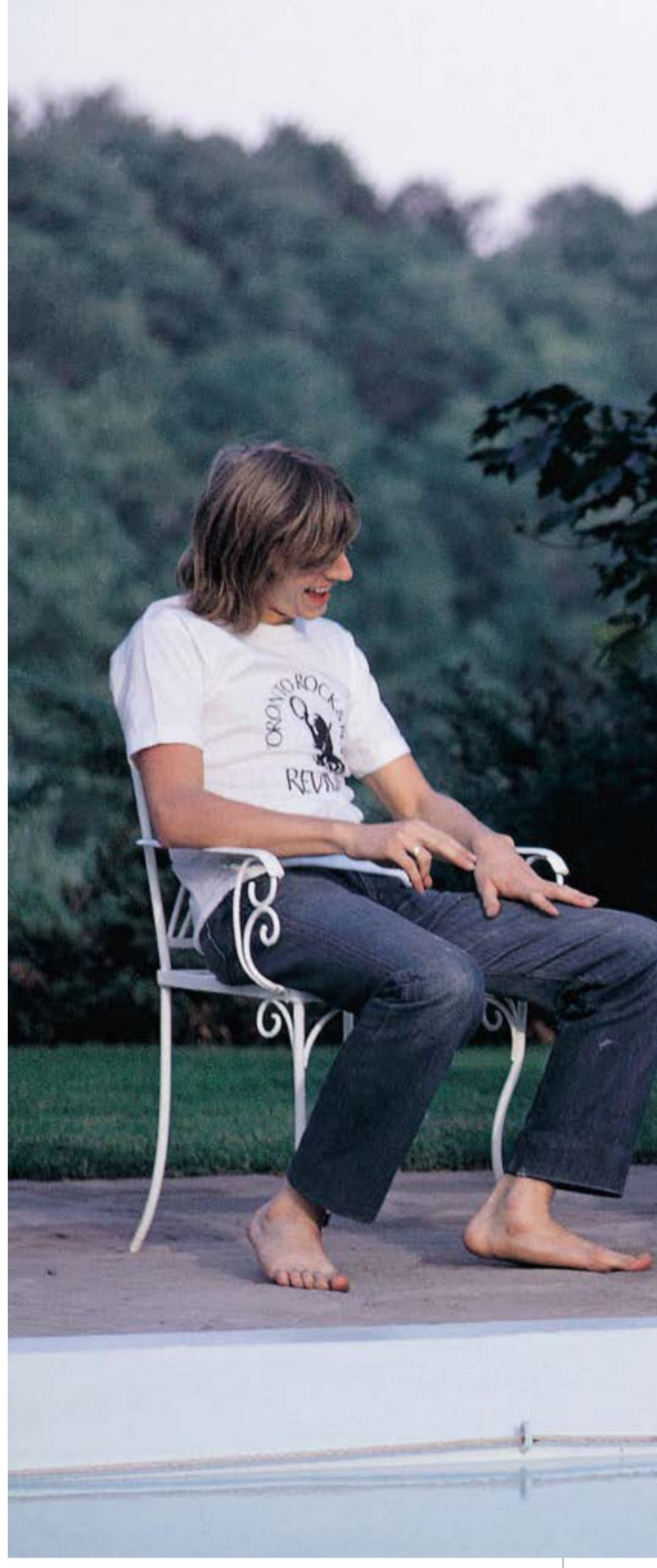
"Blue Suede Shoes", the opening song, fluctuates – as does most of *Live Peace In Toronto 1969* – between fun, panic, hesitation and a vague trust in some kind of higher power to get everyone safely to the finishing line in roughly the same key and bar. The groove is a country canter, chugging and comfy, holding steady to a pace that cricket commentators would describe as military medium. Lennon sounds in fair voice considering he's just flown 3,500 miles and spent the last half hour vomiting into a sink. But little dropouts in his vocal reveal his anxiety and self-consciousness, and it's left to Clapton – who'd played to a crowd of 100,000 with Blind Faith at Hyde Park in June, and who was probably the least fazed Plastic Ono Band member as a result – to clean up the mess with two brusque, aggressive solos. There have been better performances of "Blue Suede Shoes" in Hornsey High Street pubs, never mind football stadiums, but not under this sort of pressure.

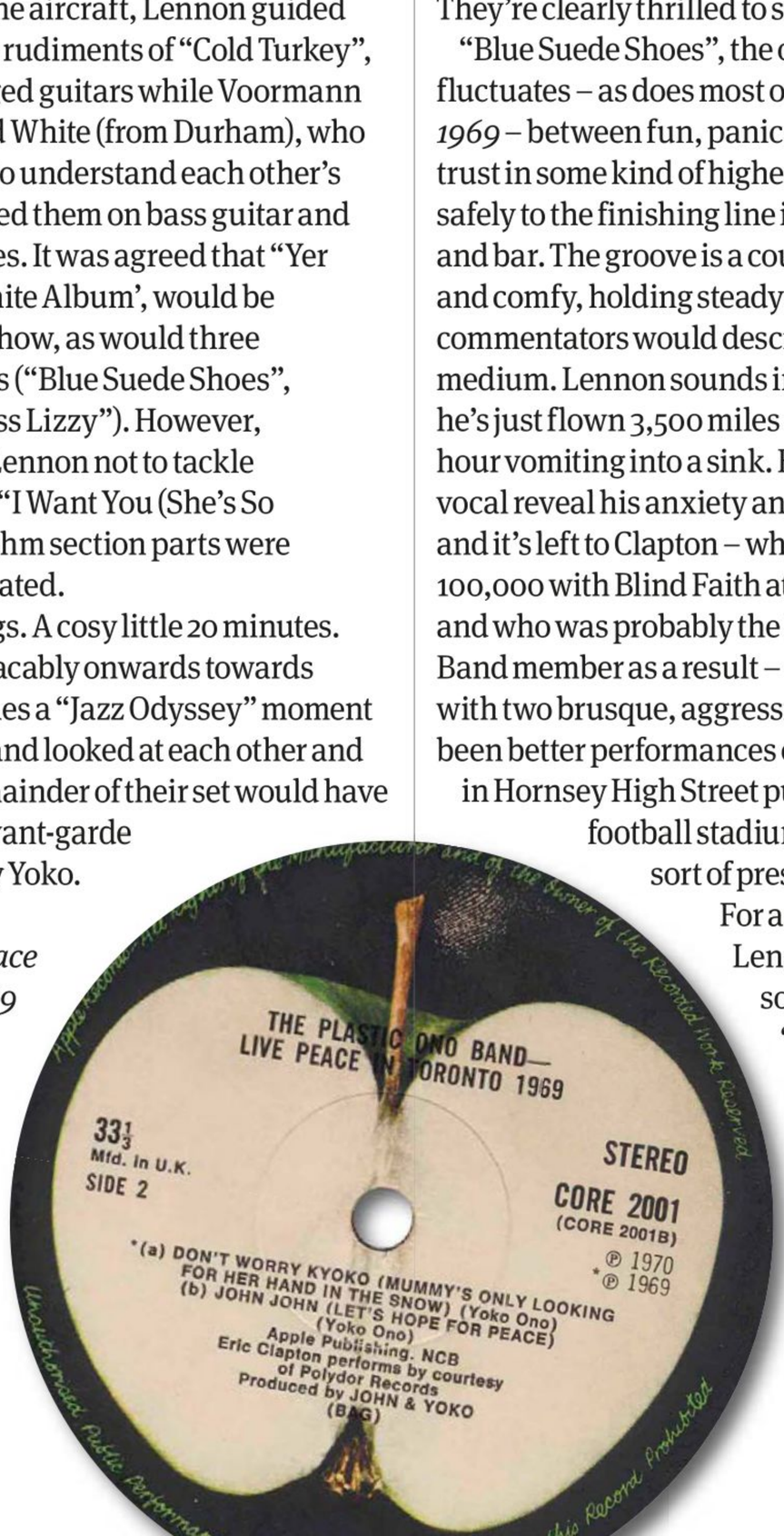
For a raucous singer like Lennon, there were certain songs that fell into the 'foolproof' category. He returned to the days of The Cavern for two of them: "Money" and "Dizzy Miss Lizzy". "Twist And Shout" would have been another obvious contender, but was omitted from the setlist, possibly because Clapton and Voormann weren't keen on doing the "*ooohs*". Fuzzier and meaner than the version on *With The Beatles*, "Money" is a growling effort that rumbles in and out of focus as Voormann tries to remember the changes and everyone wonders when Lennon will start singing. At 28, he is not the go-getting wisecracker he'd been at 22, and his sad, long moans on the line "*that's what I wa-a-a-ant oh yeah*" sound like a man regretting the money he's lost, not a man drooling over the money he dreams one day of possessing. "Dizzy Miss Lizzy", by contrast, is more of a frantic send-up, and is also curiously error-prone for such a basic 12-bar rocker. Still, it allows us to take a breather, stand back and admire the *sound*, which is far above average for a 1969 live album. Clapton's guitar, heavily FX-ed up, is a menacing presence on the left. Lennon's guitar, on the right, is slightly 'cleaner' in tone, but by no means conciliatory. In the middle, White's whippy snare drum cuts through Voormann's deep dark basslines, the two instruments sniffing around each other like unfamiliar dogs on a common. It's a natural rock'n'roll attack, even when the musicians are sometimes unsure what they're attacking, and it ranks with the finest '60s live recordings: Jerry Lee Lewis' *Live At The Star Club, Hamburg*; Dylan's *Live 1966: The 'Royal Albert Hall'*

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

"The first four or five tracks give us perhaps the best available memorial to how The Beatles sounded in their heyday at The Cavern and The Star-Club..." *Richard Williams, Melody Maker, December 6, 1969*

"How anyone could consider this entertaining listening is beyond understanding. Too many bad apples like this could well turn the whole barrel off..." *Disc And Music Echo, December 6, 1969*





Give Vs a chance: Voormann, White, Clapton and John and Yoko – Toronto, September 14, 1969, the day after the show

Concert; the Stones' *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out*.

Then comes the moment, two minutes and 20 seconds into "Dizzy Miss Lizzy", when Toronto is confronted with a sound for which nothing has prepared it. Yoko, who for several minutes has been concealed inside a large white bag in the centre of the stage, now takes hold of a microphone. The noise that emerges is like a combination of the hysterical hyena in *Lady And The Tramp* and the high-pitched ditties that Hilda Ogden used to warble as she cleaned Mike Baldwin's factory. The weird vibrating screech is a challenge to the consciousness, to put it mildly. Yoko opts for discreet silence during "Yer Blues" (a stingingly raw take, with Lennon and Clapton trading wild solos), but she soon resurfaces on "Cold Turkey" and maintains a constant chattering commentary of chimp shrieks and sheep bleats. The musicians don't seem to mind, or perhaps they're just stunned. Either way, "Cold Turkey" is a triumph, an Anglo-German slant on a West Coast groove that revels in its serrated edges. It's not long after that, though, that the Plastic Ono Band run out of songs ("Give Peace A Chance")... and so, for the entire second side of *Live Peace In Toronto 1969*, the floor is handed over to Yoko.

To many Lennon fans who own the album, for whom she is an unsolicited irritant in the proceedings, Yoko ruins a great comeback gig by caterwauling her brains out. According to eyewitnesses in the Varsity Stadium, sections of the audience reacted by sending a livid vapour of poisonous energy towards the tiny Japanese figure onstage. An alternative response – equally instinctive – is laughter; even Lennon sounds amused as he impersonates her vibrato at the end of "Cold Turkey". But the one thing we mustn't do is dismiss her, because her contribution to the album is incredibly significant and powerfully alchemical. We cannot hear the crowd's hostility per se during the 17-and-a-half improvised minutes of "Don't Worry Kyoko (Mummy's Only Looking For Her Hand In The Snow)" and "John, John (Let's Hope For Peace)" – but we can easily envisage it, because the howling maelstrom of the music behind her is so startling that it must surely be driven by Lennon's fury at seeing his wife so vilified. Is her singing tuneful? Not especially. Does it risk ridicule? At times. Is it far out? Most definitely. Yoko subverts the concert's atmosphere, so that a mood of celebration becomes a defiant stance of confrontation; so that the Plastic Ono Band, under her leadership, are not so much an impromptu rockabilly group as a proto-punk ensemble with a Pure Art attitude. Note how they exit the stage leaving their guitars feeding back against the amplifiers, an antagonistic gesture more befitting The Velvet Underground.

Lennon sounds in fair voice considering he's just flown 3,500 miles and spent half an hour vomiting into a sink...

Live Peace In Toronto 1969 doesn't attempt to explain this anomaly – how a gig can begin with 'good evening' and end with 'drop dead' – and nor, being a John & Yoko production, does it express a preference for His music over Hers. It just places them side by side, under the abstract canopy of Peace, and invites us to ask ourselves whether, by having an issue with Yoko's rock'n'roll, we may not be quite as rock'n'roll as we think.

MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD/GETTY IMAGES

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DECEMBER 6, 1969

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'People prefer a dead saint to a living annoyance like John and Yoko'

The end is nigh… In a classically candid interview, the Ono Lennons open their hearts to RICHARD WILLIAMS. From long-running battles with Paul, through to the ***Wedding Album*** and the intimate details of their marriage, nothing is off limits

ITV/SHUTTERSTOCK

From *Man Of The Decade:* 1969

» MELODY MAKER DECEMBER 6/13/20, 1969

THE RETURN OF his famous MBE may have been the starting-point of a new era for John Lennon – an era in which he feels freer to talk about all that has happened to him in the past seven years of Beatledom.

It is an undeniable fact that the four Beatles have grown further away from each other over the years and, as this happens, the truth about their early days is coming out. To some, the revelation of this truth represents the unnecessary shattering of a beautiful myth, the exploding of a fairy-tale which depicted the group as the Fab Moptops, ever-ready with a handy witticism or a hummable song.

But to John Lennon, this opening-up is a vital step. Having lived within the legend for so long, he can maintain it no longer without being inconsistent. And honesty is undoubtedly one of John's main qualities. It makes some people squirm and write outraged letters to the newspapers, but it should be given a long-overdue welcome for the rare quality it is.

Last week I spent some time with John, during which he told me the truth about the early days, the current relationships within The Beatles, and his consequent need for independence, and a host of other subjects. We begin with the group's rise to fame, and John's feelings about the way it was achieved.

"In the beginning it was a constant fight between Brian [*Epstein*] and Paul on one side and me and George on the other," he told me. "Brian put us in neat suits and shirts, and Paul was right behind him. I didn't dig that, and I used to try and get George to rebel with me. I'd say to him: 'Look, we don't need these fucking suits. Let's chuck them out of the window.' My rebellion was to have my tie loose, with the top button of my shirt undone, but Paul'd always come up to me and put it straight.

"I saw a film the other night, the first television film we ever did. The Granada people came down to film us, and there we were in suits and everything – it just wasn't us, and watching that film I knew that that was where we started to sell out. We had to do a lot of selling out then. Taking the MBE was a sell-out for me. Before you get an MBE the Palace writes to you to ask if you're going to accept it, because you're not supposed to reject it publicly. They sound you out first.

"I chucked the letter in with the fanmail, until Brian asked me if I had it. He and a few other people persuaded me that it was in our interests to take it, and it was hypocritical of me to accept it. But I'm glad, really, that I did accept it – because it meant that four years later I could use it to make a gesture.

"We did manage to refuse all sorts of things that people don't know about. For instance, we did the Royal Variety Show once, and we were asked discreetly to do it every year after that – but we always said, 'stuff it'. So every year there was a story in the newspapers saying: 'Why No Beatles For The Queen?' which was pretty funny, 'cos they didn't know we'd refused it.

"That show's a bad gig anyway. Everybody's very nervous and uptight, and nobody performs well. The time we did do it, I cracked a joke onstage. I was fantastically nervous but I wanted to say something, just to rebel a bit, and that was the best I could do."

Was there, in fact, anything at all that he enjoyed about the years of Beatlemania?

"Oh sure. I dug the fame, the power, the money, and playing to big crowds. Conquering America was the best thing. Y'see, we wanted to be bigger than Elvis – that was the main thing. At first we wanted to be Goffin and King, then we wanted to be Eddie Cochran, then we wanted to be Buddy Holly, and finally we arrived at wanting to be bigger than the biggest – and that was Elvis.

"We reckoned we could make it because there were four of us. None of us would've made it alone, because Paul wasn't quite strong enough, I didn't have enough girl-appeal, George was too quiet, and Ringo was the drummer. But we thought that everyone would be able to dig at least one of us, and that's how it turned out."

> **"*Help!* was a drag. We were on pot by then, and all the best stuff is on the cutting-room floor..."**

When John returned his MBE in protest against Britain's involvement in the Vietnam and Biafra conflicts, he added: "And against 'Cold Turkey' slipping down the charts."

Does that mean that "Cold Turkey" is a specially important record for you?

"Yes, because it's MY record. When I wrote it I went to the other three Beatles and said, 'Hey lads, I think I've written a new single.' But they all said 'Ummm... arrrrrr... welll...' because it was going to be my project, and so I thought, 'Bugger you! I'll put it out myself.' That had happened once before, when I wanted to put 'Revolution' out as a single, but 'Hey Jude' went out instead."

Does that mean that Plastic Ono Band is, for John, a kind of alternative Beatles, particularly in view of Ringo's refusal to go on tour again?

"Yes I suppose so. It's a way of getting my music out to the public. I don't bother so much about the others' songs. For instance I don't give a damn about how 'Something' is doing in the charts – I watch 'Come Together', because that's my song."

Can he ever conceive of a time when he wouldn't want his songs to be on the same album as Paul's or George's?

"I can see it happening. The Beatles can go on appealing to a wide audience as long as they make albums like *Abbey Road*, which have nice little folk songs like 'Maxwell's Silver Hammer' for the grannies to dig.

"About 'Maxwell's Hammer' – well all I can say is that I dig Engelbert Humperdinck as much as I dig John Cage, and I don't listen to either of them," he said with a marvellously relevant irrelevance.

"I always wanted to have other people on our records, like the Stones and our other friends. But some of the others wanted to keep it tight – just like The Beatles, you know? But you wait – it's starting to get looser, and there should be some fantastic sessions in the next few years. That's what I wanted all along."

Going back to the past, did he enjoy doing The Beatles' two films, *Help!* and *A Hard Day's Night*?

"I dug *A Hard Day's Night*, although Alun Owen only came with us for two days before he wrote the script. He invented that word 'grotty' – did you know that? We thought the word was really weird, and George curled up with embarrassment every time he had to say it. But it's part of the language now – you hear society people using it. Amazing.

"*Help!* was a drag, because we didn't know what was happening. In fact [*Richard*] Lester was a bit ahead of his time with the Batman thing, but we were on pot by then and all the best stuff is on the cutting-room floor, with us breaking up and falling about all over the place."

The present: has Allen Klein made an agreeable difference to Apple, which was bothering John the last time I spoke to him?

"Oh, it's really marvellous. People were very scared of him to start with – and some still are – but that's probably good. He's swept out all the rubbish and the dead wood, and stopped it being a resthouse for all the world's hippies. He won't let people order antique furniture for their offices and so forth, he's really tightened it up and it's starting to work a lot better.

"He's noticed that The Beatles had stopped selling records as they were doing around the world, and he found out that it was because the record company simply wasn't bothering to push them. They thought our records would sell themselves, and they were wrong. They don't. If you can get to No 1 in Turkey, Greece, Switzerland and a couple of other countries, then that's as good financially as getting a No 1 in Britain – they don't realise that.

"Klein's very good – he's going to make sure they stop sitting on the records and actually release them. He's even keeping tabs on me – I usually make mistakes about who to get in to survey my house, and I can spend a fortune without getting anything done. He's making sure that I do it the right way."

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

Before Lennon returned his MBE to the Queen, it had resided proudly on top of his Aunt Mimi's television set in Liverpool. It now rests in a cabinet in the Central Chancery of St James' Palace, London, still in the original presentation case and alongside John's protest letter...

Lennon and Yoko, sending his MBE back to the Queen, 1969

JOHN LENNON'S "PEACE CRUSADE" inspires a variety of emotions in people. Sadly, few of those emotions are worthy ones. John and Yoko have been mercilessly lampooned and vilified by the public and the mass media, and a great proportion of this reaction has been thoughtless and hurtful.

It would surely have been enough to make any lesser man, whose heart was not in his cause, retire from the field to a more comfortable, less publicised existence. But not the Lennons. They have kept up their output of peaceful propaganda in the face of a ceaseless barrage of insults, and the time will surely come when even their most jaundiced and gout-ridden detractors will realise their essential honesty, and their right to exercise it in the way they most see fit.

But like it or not, John Lennon and his lovely wife are in the process of becoming leaders in the public eye. They stand for a cause, and as public figures they can be held responsible for the failings and excesses of that cause.

This is not how they want it. Leadership in any form is the last cloak which Lennon wishes to put on, as he told me. "I'm not falling for that one. Like Peter Seeger said, we don't have a leader but we have a song – 'Give Peace A Chance'. So I refuse to be leader, and I'll always show my genitals or do something which prevents me from being Martin Luther King or Gandhi and getting killed. Because that's what happens to leaders. Our whole mistake is having leaders and people we can rely on or point a finger at."

Yoko, as always at John's side, chipped in: "For instance, many people say if you want to do that kind of thing, about peace, don't do anything that is misleading like showing your genitals. Always keep a clean image so that people can believe in your peace movement.

"But that's exactly what the Establishment is doing ("And that's what The Beatles did, too" – John), taking their children to church on Sundays. This is showing that, 'I'm the President of the United States and I'm all right and I'm healthy and very moral et cetera.' You don't get anywhere that way – you become just another hypocrite, and you're playing the Establishment game. We don't want to do that. We try to be honest and the point is, if we are really honest, just to make it between us is a lifetime thing, and if we can't make it together and endure each other, the word is nowhere.

"If ordinary couples can make it together and make it with their children and so forth, love-wise ("She doesn't mean 'make it' as in 'lay'" – John), you can look after the world."

John continued: "One thing we've found out is that love is a great gift, like a precious flower or something. You have to feed it and look after it, and it has storms to go through and snow, but you have to protect it. It's like a pet cat. You know, people get a cat and they don't want to feed it, or they get a dog and they don't want to walk it. But love has to be nurtured like a very sensitive animal, because that's what it is. And you have to work at love, you don't just sit round with it and it doesn't just do it for you.You've got to be very careful with it; it's the most delicate thing you can be given. It's a very delicate situation."

What will John and Yoko do about Vietnam and Biafra, which John mentioned in the letter which accompanied his MBE back to the

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TRINITY MIRROR/MIRRORPIX/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Queen? "We'll keep promoting peace in the way we do, which whichever way you look at it, is our way, because we're artists, not politicians. We don't organise, we do it the best way we know how, to make people aware that, if they want war to stop, only they can do it.

"The politicians can't do it. I think our whole movement is successful, as shown by Nixon, who's having to wriggle around a bit now and make propaganda films on the Moratorium claiming that the 'silent majority' is with him, with a highly polished Negro in an Italian suit saying how great it is to be American. Nixon has been moved by the peace movement – that includes John and Yoko and all the people in the world who are doing it, and that's how we're doing to change it. We're not going to Vietnam to die for it or going to Biagra to die for it. We've considered everything – not dying but going to the places.

"People prefer a dead saint to a living annoyance like John and Yoko. But we don't intend to be dead saints for people's convenience. They prefer Gandhi and Martin Luther King since they died, but you should see them in India now, celebrating Gandhi Year – anything less like Gandhi's principles going on in India you've never seen. It's a hoax. And so we don't intend to be dead saints – or living saints either. People don't like saints."

Their highly unusual *Wedding Album* has caused its share of controversy. Why did they make it?

Yoko: "It's like a diary, it reflects our love and peace ideas."

John: "When people get married they usually make their own wedding albums. We're public personalities and I'd enjoy reading Jackie and Onassis' album. Our wedding was public, we were sharing our diaries and our feelings with the world. So one side shows our involvement with each other, and the other side shows what we do together outside of our involvement with each other, which is promote peace."

Isn't there a danger that the diary of Yoko and John will become too public?

"We have nothing to hide. *'Everybody's got something to hide except for me and my monkey'*, you know? We keep certain parts of our life private because we're not as wild as people think. I doubt if we'll ever make love in public, or invite the TV cameras into our bedroom, and I doubt if I'll ever go to the toilet in public. Just because I think some things... I don't want to show that side of me."

Yoko: "We're from a certain generation, you can't deny that, and for people in our generation it is so difficult, and maybe the next John and Yoko will..."

"Show all," said John. "Maybe we will before we die. People hide themselves from each other all the time, and everybody's frightened of saying something nice about somebody in case they don't say anything nice back, or in case they get hurt, or of looking at somebody in case they say, 'What are you looking at?'

"Everybody's so uptight and they're always building these walls around themselves. All you can do is try and break the walls down and show that there's nothing there but PEOPLE. It's just like looking in the mirror, there's nothing to worry about – it's only people."

Yoko: "And even we are not relaxed enough as people. We have many complexities and tensions. We try hard to be honest and expose ourselves, but there are certain things that we just can't... maybe in the next generation they can, good luck to them. We're trying hard as we are."

John has always tried to carry out his philosophies and campaigns in a sense of fun. Are they, as some cynics suggest, in fact taking the mickey?

"That's true, although we're not taking the mickey. Everybody's frightened of being conned, tricked. If you say something nice to somebody they're not sure if you mean it, so that rather than respond to your loving movement they'll reject you, and that's what the press do. Because they're frightened of what we did with the MBE about the Biafra thing, they'll write about my Auntie Mimi's reaction to me giving the MBE back, because they don't want to fall for the con of 'is he joking?'

"Of course, we're joking as well. We mustn't take ourselves too seriously, otherwise it's the end. We think the mistake of everyone – Gandhi and Martin Luther King AND the left wing AND the students and all society – is taking it too seriously. If you take it seriously, it IS serious. What we try and do is be non-serious about things, but we are very serious about being not serious."

Yoko: "We may be too serious, even. We try to have a sense of humour and we try to smile at everyone a really genuine smile from the bottom of our hearts. But it's very difficult for our generation to really genuinely smile, but we're trying."

John: "It's like when I sent the MBE back, and I wrote that it was against Britain's involvement in Biafra and Vietnam and against 'Cold Turkey' slipping down the charts. When we thought of that we were screaming with laughter, and so a few snobs and hypocrites got very upset about mentioning 'Cold Turkey' with the problem of Biafra and Vietnam, but that saved it from being too serious and being another colonel protesting! You have to try and do everything with humour, and keep smiling."

'I DON'T KNOW IF I WANT TO RECORD TOGETHER AGAIN...'

In the same week, *NME* uncovers even deeper ructions within the Beatles camp

NME
DECEMBER 13, 1969

NME DECEMBER 13, 1969

I MAY BE WRONG, and I hope I am, but these are dark days for The Beatles. A few days ago John, Yoko and I talked in a 1-hour 15-minute exclusive interview. He was pleasant, together, straightforward, mellow and resolute, and only in references to Paul did his voice drop in doubt.

He told me: "Paul and I both have differences of opinion on how things should be run. But instead of it being a private argument about how an LP should be done, or a certain track, it's now a larger argument about the organisation of Apple itself.

Whether we both want the same thing from Apple in the end is a matter of opinion. But how to achieve it – that's where we digress. Mainly, we disagree on the Klein bit. But you know, I don't really want to discuss Paul without him here. It's just that as far as I can see, Paul was always waiting for This Guy to just appear and come and save us from the mess we were in.

"I'm a quarter of this building and it became a question of whether I should pull my money out if I could – which I probably can't. I did say I wanted out at one time. All my income was going in to Apple and being wasted by the joyriding people who were here. We needed a businessman.

"I know that's what's going on all the time. People come to me and say, 'Paul wants this done, what do you think?', and they know damn well what I think and they say 'all right' and then they go to Paul and say, 'John wants this done, he's off again.' The result is that we kept sending in different instructions and nothing was being done. Like people anywhere, they were getting away with what they could. We were naïve and stupid.

"What I want is for the freeloading to stop, but the old Apple spirit to remain. The spirit will be there, because if Apple is not a problem to The Beatles – which it was – it just can't help but get better. Our job is to put the creative side into Apple. If

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

The very last track to be recorded by The Beatles was George Harrison's "I Me Mine" on January 3, 1970 in Abbey Road Studio Two. The song would feature George, Paul and Ringo, along with 18 violins, four violas, four cellos, one harp, three trumpets and three trombones. But no John Lennon...

The Beatles listen to a playback of a song for the *Let It Be* film, 1969

The Beatles never recorded together again, but each put their creative efforts through Apple... that at least would be better than me having a company, Paul having a company, George having a company, and Ringo having a company. Together we at least have that much more power.

"The only way we can help other artists at Apple is the same way The Beatles helped other artists... by breaking new barriers. That's what we didn't get before. We sat back, and we started to believe our own publicity, to tell ourselves how The Beatles helped people get long hair, and The Beatles started off this, and the other.

"The Beatles split up? It just depends how much we all want to record together. I don't know if I want to record together again. I go off and on it. I really do.

"The problem is that in the old days, when we needed an album, Paul and I got together and produced enough songs for it. Nowadays, there's three of us writing prolifically and trying to fit it all onto one album. Or we have to think of a double album every time, which takes six months. That's the hang-up we have. It's not a personal 'The Beatles are fighting' thing, so much as an actual, physical problem.

"What do you do? I don't want to spend six months making an album I have two tracks on! And neither do Paul or George, probably. That's the problem. If we can overcome that, maybe it'll sort itself out. None of us want to be background musicians most of the time. It's a waste. We didn't spend 10 years making it to have the freedom of recording studios, to be able to have two tracks on an album.

"It's not like we spend our time wrestling in the studio trying to get our own songs on. We all do it the same way... we take it in turns to record a track. It's just that usually in the past, George lost out. Because Paul and I are tougher. It's nothing new, the way things are. It's human. We've always said we've had fights. It's no news that we argue. I'm more interested in my songs. Paul's more interested in his, and George is more interested in his. That's always been.

"This is why I've started with the Plastic Ono and working with Yoko... to have more outlet. There isn't enough outlet in The Beatles. The Ono Band is my escape valve. And how important that gets, as compared to The Beatles for me, I'll have to wait and see.

"You have to realise that there's a peculiar situation in that if 'Cold Turkey' had had the name 'Beatles' on it, probably it would have been a No 1. 'Cold Turkey' has got Ringo and me on, and yet half The Beatles' tracks of *Abbey Road* I'm not on, or half the tracks on the double album – and even way back. Sometimes there might be only two Beatles on a track. It's got to the situation where if we have the name 'Beatle' on it, it sells. So you get to think: 'What are we selling? Do they buy it because it's worth it, or because it says Beatles'?

"George is in the same position. I mean, he's got songs he's been trying to get on since 1920. He's got to make an album of his own. And maybe if he puts 'Beatles' on the label rather than George Harrison, it might sell more. That's the drag. Of course we could each make an album and call it 'The Beatles'. But that would be cheating. And that's not my scene.

"Anyway, folks, remember the Plastic Ono Band LP from Toronto released December the 12th, with a nice picture of the sky, and a fab calendar inside of a year's events with John and Yoko, with poetry and fun."

ALAN SMITH

FROM ALL THE publicity, welcome and unwelcome, that they have received during their two years together, John and Yoko Lennon might seem to have little or no private life together. In fact, they appear wilfully to present their joint life to the public, for that most altruistic and most misunderstood reason: to set a good example.

John has said in the past that he'd like them to be remembered as the Romeo and Juliet of the age, and when he says that I don't believe he's being egotistical. In fact the Lennons may, in a left-handed sort of way, be doing the Establishment a favour – by bringing marriage back into fashion.

Like anyone else, they do have a more private side to their life, and John comments: "There's nothing I like more than to get home at the end of the day and sit next to Yoko and say, 'Well, we're together at last.' Although we may have been holding hands all day, it's not the same when we're working or talking to the press. We feel a hundred miles apart by comparison."

It's obvious that they have changed each other, the change in John being more noticeable because we knew more of his earlier self. But how did meeting John change Yoko's life?

"He's changed everything in a sense that I was a very lonely person before I met him," she says. "Most people in the world are very lonely, that's the biggest problem, and because of their loneliness they become suspicious. And the reason we're lonely is because we can't communicate enough from the various complexes we have and from the social habits we've created. We become very inhibited, but when I met John I started to open up a little, through love, you know, and that's the greatest thing that happened to me yet.

"There are various facets to my life and my personality, and I never met anybody else who could understand me. We understand each other so well, and I'm not lonely any more – which is a shocking experience, really. Also, through loneliness or something, I was starting to become a very firm and strong ego... but that's melting away, and it's very nice."

On the other hand of the coin, how does John feel Yoko has changed him?

"Exactly the same, of course, I was lonely, and didn't have full communication with anybody and it took a bit of adjusting. She rediscovered or cultivated the thing that existed in me before I left Liverpool, maybe, and recultivated the natural John Lennon that had been lost in the Beatles thing and the worldwide thing. She encouraged me to be myself, because it was me that she fell in love with, not The Beatles or whatever I was.

"When you get sidetracked you believe it, and when you're in the dark you believe it. She came and reminded me that there was light, and when you

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"There isn't enough outlet in The Beatles. The Ono Band is my escape valve. How important it gets, we'll wait and see..."

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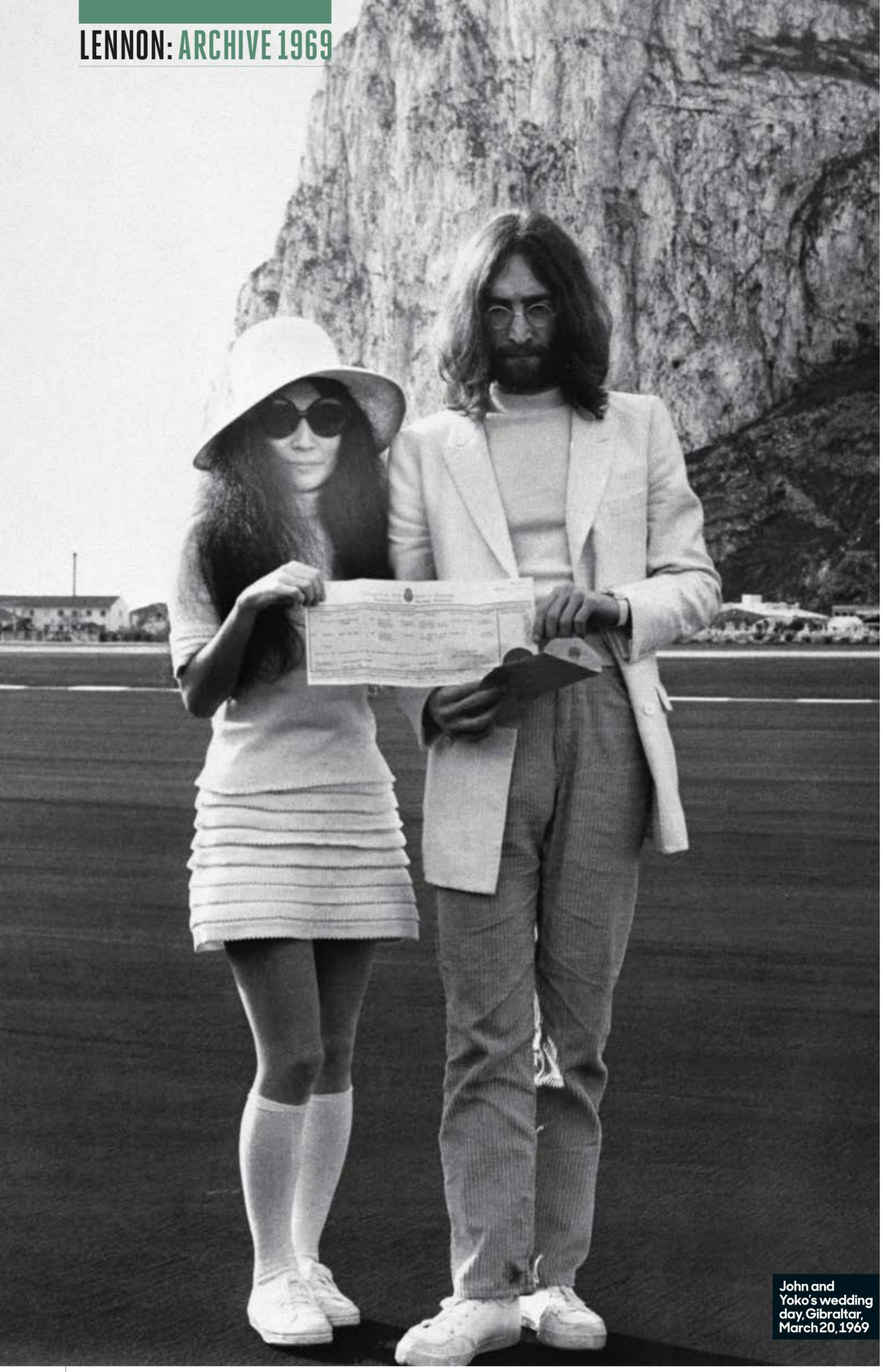

John and Yoko's wedding day, Gibraltar, March 20, 1969

remember there's light, you don't want to get back in the dark again. That's what she did for me."

Yoko: "But you know I didn't do it intentionally or anything. It's the falling-in-love bit: you start to see all sorts of things that you don't see if you're not in love. I found that he has all these qualities that he was hiding away.

"Even in a practical sense, music-wise, he was doing all sorts of freaky things at home, just recording it on a cassette or something, but not really showing it publicly. Publicly he was doing The Beatles things. But he showed me all these cassettes and things and I said, 'Why don't you produce these as records?'

"I performed the role of a mirror in a way. He was doing all those things anyway – I didn't suggest them. It was there – and that goes for his drawing, paintings, and poetry, too – especially his drawings. He's got a stack of beautiful drawings at home, and this one series he did is going to be produced as sort of lithograpth. They're not like his cartoons – they're another kind of drawing. I think they're better than Picasso."

"She's biased," said John happily.

"Yoko encouraged me to be myself, because it was me she fell in love with, not The Beatles or whatever..."

"You'll see them next year," continued Yoko. "And those things were always there in John – they just came out, but artists do need encouragement. We're always together, like 24 hours of the day. At the beginning, when we were less sure and we were still the previous us, once in a while when John was recording I'd go shopping on the King's Road or something – now we couldn't conceive of that.

"People say that if you're together 24 hours a day for two years you must get sick and tired of each other, but it's the contrary," asserted Yoko. "We got so addicted to that situation that we miss each other more. It's a strange scene."

John: "Somebody said, 'Won't you get so reliant on each other that you can't manage without each other?' and we said yes! The only thing that could split us is death, and we have to face that... and we don't even believe we'll be split then, if we work on it. Our only worry in the world is that we die together, otherwise even if it's only three minutes later it's going to be hell. I couldn't bear three minutes of it.

"Most marriages have a little pretence going on, and we thought are we going to have to pretend that we're happy together because we daren't say that we want to be apart? But that doesn't happen. When two of you are together, man and wife, there's nothing that can touch you. You have the power of two people, you have the protection – you don't need the society or the room or the uniform or the gun because you have the power of two minds, which is a pretty powerful thing."

A major part of most marriages is child-bearing. John and Yoko have one child each by their previous marriages, and Yoko has had two miscarriages since they've been together. How important do they think a child will be to their relationship?

"We're not even sure that we want children," said John. "We're that jealous. But if God or whoever gives us a child, we'll accept it. Maybe we'd like two or three. But even then we have to consider: is a child going to interfere between us? How can we look after a child and be together 24 hours a day?"

Yoko: "It's not fair to the child, maybe, because we are so close. The child will be somebody that will be saying 'hello' once in a while."

John: "Obviously it'll probably be different if we have one, because all the times she's pregnant we consider it. We're full into it, wanting a child, but when you lose it and you get over the pain then you consider whether you wanted the child. Now maybe we had that in the back of our minds all along, and that's why she lost it. We don't really know whether we want one or not. If she gets pregnant, we'll want one, but I would like her not to be pregnant for a bit – she's been pregnant since I met her! I'd like her to stay slim for a year and then maybe have one. But we don't fancy birth pills because I don't trust them and anything else is out of the question [*laughs*] because it's inconvenient. We're not like that – we try to act naturally at all times.

"That's one of our problems, besides death. It's in God's hands."

GETTY IMAGES/BETTEMAN

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PLASTIC ONO BAND

The unfettered confessions of a motherless ex-Beatle. Has self-obsession ever sounded so compelling, and tuneful?

BY DAVID QUANTICK

RELEASE DATE
11 DECEMBER 1970

IT DOESN'T HAVE a hit single. It doesn't have harmonies, orchestras, or songs about people who weren't John Lennon or The Beatles or a relative or partner thereof. It's one of the smallest, most concentrated concept albums ever made (the concept being "John Lennon"), it is without doubt one of the best albums ever made. And it changed quite a lot of things forever.

Recorded at an even more turbulent period in John Lennon's life than usual (the only non-turbulent period of Lennon's life being, quite possibly, a few months in 1978/79), *Plastic Ono Band* is a brilliant 39-minute box of contradictions. It's about rage and screaming and emotional upheaval, but even in its most vehement moments, the album sounds controlled and often calm. It's produced by Phil Spector, the most excessive, absurd and melodramatic producer of all time, famous for his untrammelled use of orchestras, choirs, pianos and guns, but it only has four or five instruments on it. It's sparse-sounding and it's full-sounding. It's almost completely fuelled by the avant-garde influence of Yoko Ono, but nearly every song here is as or more tuneful than anything written by The Beatles.

And, most importantly, it's completely self-absorbed and solipsistic but it's also utterly universal. I said earlier that it doesn't have a hit single – various tracks have been released after the fact but that doesn't count, Mister and Mrs Internet – but it does have a massive hit track in the form of "Working Class Hero". A Dylanesque song unique in the Lennon canon (unless you count, and I don't, "You've Got To Hide Your Love Away"), "Working Class Hero" contains the F-word twice, ensuring that of all people the Australians got a censored album, is played and sung with near-bleakness and is a song which, if not necessarily completely honest, so encapsulates the whole idea of "honesty" that it's become the most covered Lennon song on this album. Bands as integrity-driven as Green Day and the Manic Street Preachers have been drawn to it, while artists as diverse as Marianne Faithfull, Ozzy Osbourne and

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1	Mother	★★★★★
2	Hold on	★★★★★
3	I Found Out	★★★★★
4	Working Class Hero	★★★★★
5	Isolation	★★★★★
6	Remember	★★★★★
7	Love	★★★★★
8	Well Well Well	★★★★★
9	Look At Me	★★★★★
10	God	★★★★★
11	My Mummy's Dead	★★★★★

2000 REISSUE BONUS TRACKS

12	Power To The People	★★
13	Do The Oz	★★

- **Released:** December 11, 1970
- **Produced by:** John Lennon, Yoko Ono & Phil Spector
- **Recorded at:** Abbey Road Studios & Ascot Sound Studios (September 26 – October 26, 1970)
- **Personnel:** John Lennon (vocals, acoustic and electric guitars, piano, keyboards); Klaus Voormann (bass); Ringo Starr (drums); Billy Preston (piano on "God"); Phil Spector (piano on "Love"); Yoko Ono (wind); Mal Evans (tea and sympathy)
- **Highest chart position:** UK 8; US 6

JOHN LENNON/PLASTIC ONO BAND

JOHN LENNON/PLASTIC ONO BAND

JOHN LENNON
PLASTIC ONO BAND
First assignee of all copyrights
Maclen (Music) Ltd., (U. K.) BMI
Stereo
SW 3372
(SW-1-3372)
Side One
1. MOTHER
(John Lennon)
2. HOLD ON
(John Lennon)
5:29
3. I FOUND OUT
(John Lennon)
1:49
4. WORKING CLASS HERO
(John Lennon)
3:33
5. ISOLATION
(John Lennon)
3:44
2:48
Produced By John and Yoko
and Phil Spector
Recorded in England

Making the cut: John & Yoko, London 1970

YOKO ON... "WORKING CLASS HERO"

"There was a commotion [*about the word 'fuckin" in the lyrics*], and most people thought, 'Oh, he just put it in to startle people.' But he told me, 'That's part of being working-class. It won't be working-class if what you say is all very clean and very proper, and so I could have put the F-word every other word.'

"He was just trying to tell everybody that that's what he is, not that sort of mophead Beatle. I think that people can identify with that because he's being real. And the other kind of showbiz side, well, some friends of his, all kind of showbiz on the stage, he was always not that... John was just a bloke telling his life story."

PENNY TWEEDIE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Elbow have also seen it as a mirror to their own lives.

The oddest thing about "Working Class Hero" isn't anything to do with what class background Lennon came from, or his attack on a hoi polloi who were "*still fucking peasants as far as I can see*", but the last line: "*If you want to be a hero then just follow me.*" Having spent the rest of the album asserting his own individuality and effectively telling people to be themselves, it's typically Lennon (but is anything *not* typically Lennon? Golf, perhaps) that he contradicts himself, quite possibly, for the sake of an easy rhyme.

"Working Class Hero" also indicates one of the glories of this record that, for all its brilliantly designed unified sound – I do not think that any drummer has ever been recorded as well as Ringo Starr on this album – it uses Lennon's pop skills to their maximum. There are relatively few instruments on this album, but the combination of Spector's Wall Of Minimalist Sound and John Lennon's songwriting makes it sound as varied and inventive as the 'White Album'. There are dramatic piano songs ("Mother", "God", "Remember"). There are plaintive ballads ("Look At Me", "Love"). There are extraordinary rockers ("I Found Out", "Well Well Well"). There's a home recording, a short piece whose nakedness and emotion had never been tried on a record by a major pop star before – the still-forceful "My Mummy's Dead", a song which does everything the equally excellent "Mother" does in 48 seconds.

And the tunes are great. It may seem odd to praise the toe-tapping qualities of an album noted for its soul-ripping honesty, but Lennon's melodic skills are at their peak on *Plastic Ono Band*. "Isolation" in particular is as beautiful as any other melody Lennon wrote, while "God", as a piece of music, is both complex and utterly appropriate to the three-stage lyric Lennon wrote for it: from the initial statement of intent ("*God is a concept by which we measure our pain*"); to the Big List, where Lennon ticks off everything he doesn't believe (getting God, Buddha and most forms of spirituality out of t he way before dealing with the real shocker – that he doesn't "*believe in Beatles*"); and then the perfectly judged coda, where everything settles into who and where he is now. "God" is as good, if not better, than anything Lennon did with The Beatles.

One or two things, of course, that Lennon did with The Beatles actually turn up here. "Look At Me" is a Rishikesh reject, possibly as it occupies the unlikely middle ground between "Julia" and "I'm So Tired". "Remember" began as a jam at the end of, amazingly, George's "Something"; this is perhaps why, like most jams, it starts to run out of steam towards the end and, as Lennon admitted, had to be terminated in a big explosion. And The Beatles themselves turn up, once in "God" and once, in a brief slight that was to turn into the greatest rock dis of all time, in "I Found Out"'s line "*I seen religion/ From Jesus to Paul*". (*Imagine*'s "How Do You Sleep?" was, like much about *Imagine*, a slightly poppier sequel to *Plastic Ono Band*).

Paul McCartney, though, is a minor figure on this album, with only one mildly acerbic reference. The real major characters of *Plastic Ono Band* – apart from Lennon himself – are Lennon's mother Julia, Lennon's wife Yoko Ono and, to a lesser extent, Lennon's father Freddie. As surely everybody on earth knows, Lennon was raised apart from his mother who, after being briefly reunited with her son, was hit by a car and killed. Before this album, Lennon and Ono went to Doctor Arthur Janov for Primal Scream Therapy and the resulting emotional release fuels most of this album, and also explains why *Plastic Ono Band*'s only real spiritual parallel is the mature, reflective *Double Fantasy*.

Lennon's mother is the figure who bookends this album in "Mother" and "My Mummy's Dead". Lennon's father gets a mention or two in "Mother" but, as has been written enough to make me want to move on quite quickly, Lennon's real muse was Yoko Ono, who replaced Julia Lennon as the female figure in his life. Here her intense conversations and modern attitudes fill "Well Well Well" and her love fills, well, "Love", and brings "God" to its gliding, peaceful end. Interestingly, her music is less influential here, perhaps because Lennon addressed her avant-garde qualities on the mirror-release of *Yoko Ono/ Plastic Band* – which contains some of his absolute best guitar work as well as some of her best songs – and perhaps because he fancied being a songwriter again.

Yoko was to surface more in Lennon's later work where, typically, his songs to her are either joyful yelps of praise or apologies for being useless. Here she is more muse than anything else, and this is almost certainly because, despite the "John and Yoko" credits, this record is ultimately and fairly obviously about John Lennon. All the other figures – from Julia Lennon to Buddha – radiate from the man in the middle, who has never used the words "*I*" and "*me*" to such powerful effect as in these songs. At this time, and on later occasions, Lennon also essayed the issue song more than once, and often convincingly, but it's his overwhelming belief in personal honesty that runs *Plastic Ono Band*.

It's fuelled by the influence of Yoko, but nearly every song here is as or more tuneful than anything by The Beatles...

The brilliant author of *Revolution In The Head*, Ian MacDonald, wrote that Lennon valued honesty to such an extent that it became an Achilles heel, that given the choice between a rough old goat of a song (I'm paraphrasing him slightly here) that was chest-baringly truthful and an absolutely glorious and inventive pop song about not much, Lennon would always favour the former (which is why he didn't apparently like "And Your Bird Can Sing"). This could be problematic in Lennon's work, and would lead him to be absurdly dismissive of Paul McCartney's solo records, which were frequently gorgeous, inventive and hollow.

But on *Plastic Ono Band* he found the perfect way to combine the two. There are, as has been mentioned no harmonies or orchestras (the bizarreness of the Flux Fiddlers was, however, imminent). There are very few sound effects (the slowed-down bell at the start of "Mother" is not the sort of audio trick that would have taxed George Martin). And there is no decoration.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Melodically there is nothing earth-shattering... the greatest importance must be attached to his lyrics, which are so personal and honest that it hurts"
Michael Watts, Melody Maker, December 12, 1970

"Lennon has much fear in his makeup and a great big chip on his shoulder about the unfairness of the world..."
Andy Gray, NME, December 12, 1970

This is as far from *Abbey Road*'s glossy vignettes as possible. Nevertheless, as a piece of imagination and unique creativity, *Plastic Ono Band* is a masterpiece. Not only did Spector fill every corner with a beautiful sparseness, but Lennon used every device at his disposal to make the album thrilling. The piano playing on "God" is as pretty as the lyrics are moving. The guitar on "I Found Out" is as intense as it is angry. The fade-in of "Love" is simple and effective. And, finally, the lo-fi of "My Mummy's Dead" is utterly, frighteningly brilliant.

Most of all, though, what John Lennon did with this album was create, not just a brilliant personal statement, but the definitive template for a certain kind of music. The 1960s had seen, sometimes through clenched fingers, the rise and rise of the singer-songwriter. Would-be Dylans abounded like acoustic rats. Now (thanks in part to The Beatles, who had signed James Taylor), the early 1970s were to be the launching point for a new kind of confessional, self-absorbed singer-songwriter, all faded denim and lovelorn lyricism. This might have been the route for non-fun popular music ever afterwards had not John Lennon, also quite keen on writing songs about himself, set fire to the goalposts, punctured the ball and eaten the ref.

Thanks to Plastic Ono Band, music like this would not be mealy-tongued bedsit weeping or acoustic stories of lovely ladies who didn't fancy some hippy, but would instead emphasise the real confessional and be a genuine catalyst for pain. The tortured artist is, rightly, often mocked in popular music, where your girlfriend not putting sugar in your tea can be the trigger for a triple album. But there are artists, from Nick Drake to Kurt Cobain, from name your favourite to I'll name mine, who were encouraged by how Lennon found a way to turn music into a conduit for his pain, and make something brilliant from it. (I don't just mean lyrically or melodically either; it surprised no-one when the clear, white, terse album that was Joy Division's *Closer* contained a mother-referencing song with the same name as a *Plastic Ono Band* track, "Isolation".)

Today, people see John Lennon in many different ways. The absurd reverence he despised sometimes turns into a mildly cynical contempt for the flawed human being he always was. It doesn't matter now; who he really was is solely a matter for his loved ones. For the rest of us, we can unequivocally admire and enjoy this album, which, more than anything else he ever did, presents how John Lennon saw John Lennon. And for that, he deserves everything good.

'My function in society is to be an artist'

Imagine might be "the effin' best thing I've ever done," but, with typical perversity, Lennon concentrates his energies on promoting Yoko's book… ALAN SMITH and MICHAEL WATTS hear of his dreams of the avant-garde and a Socialist Britain. And, of course, still more thoughts on the festering aftermath of The Beatles…

NME
JULY 31, 1971

NME
AUGUST 7, 1971

MELODY MAKER
OCTOBER 2, 1971

GETTY IMAGES/BETTMANN

» NME JULY 31, 1971

"I never wanted The Beatles to be has-beens. I wanted to kill it while it was on top"

THE LENNONS HAVE been holding court this week, unashamedly plugging Yoko's new *Grapefruit* paperback from the fine but homely splendour of their white Georgian residence near Ascot. Macrobiotics out of the window, Lennon himself drinks a beverage called "Dr Pepper" (with sodium benzoate) and we sit and talk at the low pine table in a quarry-tiled kitchen that's all sunshine and stainless steel. Ordered chaos prevails and there's a film team ("Been here a month, going back to sanity") and a photographer from a straight daily. Yoko comes into the room with black hotpants and a deep cleavage. "Now," says the photographer, "I wonder if I could have a picture of you cooking?"

"Cooking!?" explodes Lennon. "In an outfit like that? You must be effin' crackers!"

His own recording studio is behind the kitchen ("It's better than EMI's, because I've got newer equipment") and in there I listen to his new album for autumn release. More next week, but there is no doubt of it whatsoever, it's the best thing he's ever done. I know it – he knows it.

"Isn't it GREAT? This'll show 'em, the bastards."

The thing with the new album is that he's got a medium line between the need to bear his soul and the need to make good music. It's not only worthwhile, it's more than usually commercial. And as for Side One, Track One, a gently-felt journey into his imagination...tremendous.

It's a nice day that day, and Lennon is in fine form, hair cropped, face fresh.

What happens when you've finished the promotion of Grapefruit I ask?

"When that's over, answered Lennon , "Yoko's having an off-Broadway play in New York. It's based on the book, and it's called *Of A Grapefruit In A World Apart*. She did it ten years ago at Carnegie, and now she's sort of pepping it up. There might be an off-Broadway play of my book, but I've got to read the script and I find it very hard to say yes or no to the people who're gonna do it. I've been carrying it around for months. Yoko's directing her play, and from September to January we reckon we'll be in the States. We're doing a few things there. So don't worry."

NME: How about the Bangla Desh concert in the States?

John: That's George, but I won't be there because we have to go to the Virgin Islands to go to court about Kyoko, and then I have to go to Texas about it too – 'cos Tony [*Cox, Yoko's ex-husband and Kyoko's father*] is suing us from Texas or somethin'. If we got the kid back we might do it. But otherwise... The whole thing's been going on for two years. Forever.

Is that today's paper? What's in it... Paul and Wife... Sued. Oh that, that's been goin' on for years. You see, what Paul's mistake here was, he tried to take it all for 'Another Day'. Now I wrote 'God Save Us' with Yoko, and 'Do The Oz', and there's one track on the album she wrote. She had written other things, even 'Julia', back in the Beatles days, although I never put it on.

What we did was, we just called Lew Grade, and they know she writes music, and we said 'Look, we've done it, so what do you want to do about it?' And he said, 'well let's split it,' so we just split it. Ono Music, and Northern Songs.

The thing with Paul is, he wants all the action. He wants it all. It's not just the money. It's the principle. I think, for instance, that Paul's cost us probably over a million since he started this thing. And his tax counsel's just come up and given us exactly the tax advice we gave him two years ago, to tell him exactly not to do all what he's done. So it's cost us quite a bit....trying to see it his way.

NME: Does it needle you, deep down, or maybe only about so far?

John: Only so far. I tell you, it's like Monopoly, only with real money. And it's costing us a fortune, so the sooner it's over the better.

NME: About your comments on the Parkinson TV show, on the possibility of making it up with Paul...

John: Yeah. We were great on that show. We were GREAT! It's like they said, isn't that old John we used to love? I said it is, I said it IS!

NME: You are, indeed, looking very fit. And to what do you owe this newfound glow?

John: We're both in good condition. No special reason, we're just feeling good. Wait till you hear the album. It's gonna blow *Y'mahnd*!

NME: So how about the possibility....

John: [*He called across the room*]: Peter. Peter... I'm straight. And it's late. You realise that? Now where were we? Carry on.

NME: About the possibility of a reconciliation with Paul.

John: I was asked the usual thing on the show about Paul, and I said that maybe about a year or two after all the money thing's settled, we might have dinner or forget about it, y'know. We might even celebrate getting it all over with. I don't know. I can't tell. And there's no possibility at all, till it's settled.

NME: I'd like to talk to Yoko in a moment about the book.

John: She'll be back in a minute, and she won't let you talk about anything else.

NME: Is Yoko a withdrawn woman... or shy?

John: Oh shy, sure. She won't ever say anything, unless you actually ask her. Although she might do now, because we're really on the push for *Grapefruit*. We've really been selling it. We've done appearances in Selfridges, the Claude Gill Bookshop, interviews every day... We're really trying to sell it. Yoko's like me. All extroverts are shy. I'm shy unless I know somebody. And then I'm a bighead.

NME: Some people may sneer at the whole concept of you both 'doing the rounds' of the bookshops – throwing yourself in at the deep end of the publicity circus, so to speak. Any comments?

John: Well the answer is that last year, because we were in the therapy, we couldn't plug the hardback, and so we only sold 2,000. That's the answer to that. We also had the publisher then, Peter Owen, badmouthing us in the press saying what bastards we were because we didn't turn up to plug it. But we were in the therapy. We couldn't. And then I couldn't get to America to plug the book, of course, because they wouldn't let me in when it came out.

I reckon that if we push *Grapefruit* then it might sell 5,000 here and 200,000 in America. And that's what I'm doing it for....because I think the book's important.

Having been through a lot of trips, like macrobiotics, Maharishi, the Bible, I-Ching... having been through all those trips....and you know, Yoko brought me out of all of them...the first thing I did was a 'You Are Here' show at the Robert Fraser Gallery.

That's all them gurus'll ever tell you. Remember this moment now. I was talking to George the other day, and I forgot to say to him – 'What are you searching for?' 'You Are Here.'

What I'm really saying is, I think, this is an important book to help people act out their madness. If you do some of the things in it, you stop going crazy in a way.

This Yoko book has changed some people's lives. It's on the curriculum of at least 10 to 15 universities in America. It was even at Liverpool University. They set it as part of the course.

There's a girl called Charlotte Mormon who used to be a very straight New York School of Music Cellist. Then she dropped it all and went out, after reading *Grapefruit* in its original form ten years ago, and ever since she's gone around the world performing Yoko's pieces. You might have heard of this girl, she's the one who goes around playing cello with her tits out.

The thing about Yoko's art is, it lets people contribute themselves. It's like her 'Cut Piece', in which the audience is invited to cut the girl's clothes. It was done before an audience of some of the finest intellects in America, and they did it like animals. They went mad. Then, on another occasion, there was a performance for nuns, and even they asked for 'Cut Piece'. But this time there was a difference. The nuns cut hearts, and flowers. They were like children... gentle.

Do you see it now, the way her art is your own reaction? Julian picks the book up and loves it. But somebody with an intellect... they'll have a tough time getting through.

The intellectual physicists who'd gone mad, with the scissors, they complained to the papers. But the nuns and the Mother Superior, they said

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

On April 19, 1967, The Beatles signed 80 per cent of their earnings away to Apple Corps in order to circumvent heavy taxation. The resulting deal tied up all assets and left each Beatle with a salary of £800,000 pa. The decision resulted in legal proceedings that took years to resolve...

With Yoko Ono, signing copies of her conceptual art book, *Grapefruit*, at Selfridges, London, July 15, 1971

they understood the meaning, because they gave themselves fully to Christ.

Yoko burst in at this moment happy, warm, eyes afire. "It's so beautiful, because Mimi's come around and we're really going to be friends and I thought I'd invite her here and to stay and meet my mother and father and it will really be great."

This understandable flood of pleasure stemmed from the possibility of a coming together between Yoko and Aunt Mimi – *the* Aunt Mimi – but Lennon was strangely ill-at-ease with such raw emotion.

Yoko told how Mimi had seen them both on TV, and there was now acceptance again: "John is now looking like what I used to like."

NME: How did the Janov therapy affect your marriage?

Yoko: Ahem, yes. Yes, there was a great strain on it, but it brought us closer together in the end. Okay Yoko, now come and get on with yer plugging.

Yoko: If we can get Mimi and everybody together, it will be some dream. I'm going to send her a really nice copy of my book.

NME: Yoko, in Grapefruit you give instructions for readers to burn the book once it's finished with. Is that serious?

Yoko: Oh yes. If you go back on the things in it all the time, then you always have to rely on the book. But once you read it, you know, it's here in your head. This book is really just to give a frame of mind. Anybody can get anything out of it, without special skill. It was like The Beatles being famous. They had a frame of mind to be famous. And they *were* famous. ***ALAN SMITH***

» NME AUGUST 7, 1971

NME: YOKO'S ART seems to me to exclude appreciation of the more established works of art: the Mona Lisa and so on.

John: Not necessarily, but her art is the very opposite of making a saint out of the Mona Lisa, or having it in a building where people could be living.

Yoko: I'm not somebody who wants to burn the Mona Lisa. That's the great difference between some revolutionaries and me: they think you have to burn the Establishment. I'm not: I'm saying make the Mona Lisa into something like a shirt. Change the value of it.

John: Yoko feels that any woman can create; a man destroys; and an artist revalues. An artist doesn't create because everything's already here. And a scientist doesn't create, he discovers.

Yoko: It was like those four boys got together to make The Beatles, and without kidding anybody they changed the whole world. And that's beautiful. That's all I'm trying to do. The only thing with The Beatles was that they changed it, and then they stopped there. They weren't going on being revolutionaries. Tell him, John, about that Japanese temple... because that's just what you yourself did.

John: Yeah. Well there was this Japanese monk, and it happened in the last 20 years. He was in love with this big golden temple, y'know, he really dug it like — and you know he was so in love with it, he burnt it down so that it would never deteriorate. That's what I did with The Beatles. I never wanted them to be has-beens or you know, not the Marx Brothers – who were those people – the Crazy Gang. It was like they were dragging them on out of their death beds. To give a laff... I wanted to kill it while it was on top.

Remember, I did say 10 years ago: I'm not going to be singing "She Loves You" at 30. Although I expressed it that way I really meant that, by 30, I guess I would have woken up a bit, or changed my sights.

NME: Isn't there room today for The Beatles as a living band, a contemporary band? You're surely now all far more aware as people. Must it always now be for you that

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GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

The Beatles made "yesterday" music? Or is the difficulty that you're all now too egocentric to work together fully, even if you tried?

John: We always were egocentric. But look, George is on half of my new album playing guitar. The only reason Ringo wasn't on it was because he was abroad, making his movie. So then the three of us would have been on, but then it wouldn't have been The Beatles, it would have been Plastic Ono....because I would have had final say. There would have been no decision-making by George and Ringo, other than if I liked the idea I'd take it. Which is what happened in The Beatles – but then it was a bit more diplomatic. So yes, that's quite possible about The Beatles as a working unit.... because I might just as well play on George's or Ringo's, if they wanted my style of playing!

But imagine how we've flowered since then. George is suddenly the biggest seller of all of us. I think my music's improved a million-fold, lyric-wise and everything. And Ringo's coming out and writing "It Don't Come Easy", and now he's gonna write the title song for this cowboy thing he's in, and he's playing a really tough guy and all that. It's really beautiful.

The fact is, The Beatles have left school... and we have to get a job. And that's made us really work harder. I think we're much better than we ever were when we were together. Look at us today. I'd sooner have *Ram*, *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*; George's album; and Ringo's single and his movies than *Let It Be*, or *Abbey Road*.

Yoko: If the four of them had gone on, then they would have suffocated each other.

NME: Do you resent journalists talking about the past?

John: No, I don't resent it: I'm always doing it myself. Maybe I'll meet you or Ray Connolly and I'll say "Hey, d'you remember when we did that, or this?" It's only human. Something funny happened the other day. I went into Apple and they said "Jesus you look like a Beatle again." And do you know something – just for a second, I'd forgotten what a Beatle was. Really. It was 'cos I'd just got back from New York, and I hadn't been a Beatle at all. It'd just been me and Yoko, and we'd been doing all sorts of things.

NME: Do either of you now feel any pain, any problems, mental or physical. Or are you totally cleansed of the hang-ups of the past?

John: Oh no. Oh sure not. I just know myself better, that's all, so I can handle myself better. That Janov thing, the Primal Scream and so on, it does affect you because you recognise yourself in there. The difference between us and Janov, as Yoko puts it, is that the past we remember is the past we create now, because of the necessity of the present. I wouldn't have missed it, though. It was very good for me. And I still 'Prime,' and it still works.

NME: Tell me about your philosophy of life. Many of your comments on society have been construed as extreme left wing or communist.

John: They knock me for saying "Power To The People", and say that no one section should have the power. Crap. The people aren't a section. The people means everyone. I think that everybody should own everything equally and that the people should own part of the factories and they should have some say in who is the boss and who does what. It's the same as students should be able to select teachers.

It may be like communism, but I don't really know what real communism is. There is no real communist state in the world, you must realise that. Russia isn't. It's a fascist state. The socialism I talk about is a British Socialism, not where some daft Russian might do it, or the Chinese might do it. That might suit them. Us, we'd have a nice socialism here. A British Socialism.

NME: Shouldn't "the people" then own part of Apple? Shouldn't the employees there have a slice of the profits?

John: They would. In Socialist Britain, I'm not sure how something like a record company would be run, but they would certainly have a piece, the thing at the moment is, it's not mine. What do you think this whole thing is that's goin' on? If I had my way, it would be different altogether. If the workers ever took it over, they could have it. I said that years ago. Maybe in a true socialist state they could have a piece of a record and say whether Clapton or who came in. Everything here in this country belongs to everybody, not just a few chosen people. And it was taken off 'em.

NME: Films...Don't you both spend a great deal of time filming yourselves. And having yourselves filmed?

John: Why not? It's home movies. And the ultimate movie is a home movie. Luc Godard, or whatever his name is, is now making 8mm films. Home movies is where it's at. Poetry's done at home. Why shouldn't movies be the same way? In our film *Apotheosis*, you see us only for two seconds. In *Fly*, Yoko's film, she's not in it. In *Rape* there was a Hungarian girl. In *Erection*, the one I've just made about a hotel, it was just done with still photographs over a year and a half, so it just grows in front of you. There's only a couple with us in – so that whole thing is a lie.

Yoko: If we were putting ourselves in films all the time, so what? We do not pretend.

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

In 2002, a BBC poll on the 100 Greatest Britons voted Lennon No 8. He was sandwiched between Queen Elizabeth I (No 7) and Vice Admiral Horatio Nelson (No 9). Topping the list were Sir Winston Churchill, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Diana Spencer and Charles Darwin

John helps Yoko with her 'This is Not Here... An Exhibit Of Conceptual Works Of Art', Everson Art Museum, Syracuse

GETTY IMAGES/BETTMANN

NME: Are you now even remotely interested in singles or chart success?
John: Yeah! Sure! I get all the musical papers and the daily papers, I get my world chart thing and *Billboard* and the other one, *Cashbox*, and I mark off all the Apple records including Paul, all round the world. I tell you, The Beatles are blasting the world up. We've got records everywhere...and two or three in every chart. It's fantastic. George, Ringo, Paul and me are in every chart in the world. It's great.

I get a kick out of it both because I'm getting through to all those people, and because I'm doing it on my own or with Yoko. It's all that. And I like singles and not LPs, really, because I like the idea of saying everything in three minutes.

NME: Did you listen to *Ram*?
John: Yes, of course I did. A couple of times. The first time I heard it I thought, fucking hell, it was awful. And then, ahem, the second time I fixed the record player a bit, and it sounded better. I enjoyed a couple, like a little bit of "My Dog It's Got Three Legs" or something, and the intro to "Ram On" and the intro to "Uncle Albert." I can't STAND the second track from the... I mean, well, that doesn't matter anyway.

You know, in general I think the other album he did was better, in a way. At least there was some songs on it. I don't like this dribblin' pop opera jazz, y'know. I like pop RECORDS that are POP RECORDS. I know you yourself didn't like it. I was really surprised when I saw that bit...

NME: I didn't like the last Beatles album either, I'm afraid. I thought the whole thing came over as some kind of cardboard epitaph... lots of cardboard, not much music.
Yoko: I think you were right, probably.
John: Except for "Across the Universe!"
NME: And the bootleg tape...
John: Ah, you've got that. So you see what Spector did, don'tcha? I'm glad the bootleg is going about, because it shows that Paul was wrong when he was putting down Spector. All he was trying to do was put down the album, 'cos he was out then.

NME: Is there a song on your new album which refers to Paul...lines about pretty face and the sound of muzak?
JL [*smiling, words spaced*]: Er, there's a song which could well be a statement about Paul. It could be interpreted that way.

But then, it could also be about an old chick I'd known... Or somethin'!

John talked about his forthcoming *Imagine* LP out next month:
John: It's the effin' best thing I've ever done... fantastic. This'll show 'em. It's not a personal thing like the last album, but I've learned a lot and this is better in every way, technique and so on. It's lighter, too. I was feeling happy. There's a guy called George Harrison who's on it, and who does some mother of solos. George used to be with the Bubbles or somebody. Then there's a guy called Nicky Hopkins.

Then there's Jim Gordon on drums, Alan White on drums, Jim Keltner on drums, and they're fantastic. Yoko's on whip, and that's very good. Whip and mirror, actually. Then we had John Barnham on a few things, King Curtis is on sax, the Flux Fiddlers are on violins. Eighty per cent was recorded here in seven days. I took them, remixed them, and took it to America like they used to do it in the old days.

It took me nine days to make this album and ten to make the last one. So I'm gettin' faster."

ALAN SMITH

"*Imagine* will show 'em. It's better in every way to the last album, technique and so on. It's lighter, too"

» **MELODY MAKER** OCT 2, 1971

WE'RE THERE BECAUSE Yin and Yang are in town and the word is out that they're doing interviews. Not more than ten yards away, in fact, behind that door with its tall glass mirror, which is reflecting the green upholstered sofa and the white walls decorated with album covers of all the Apple artists.

We're not alone, me and the photographer. There's a man from *The Sydney Herald*, rather straight-looking, in a mackintosh, perched on a chair, just opposite. Fiddling nervously with a notebook, turning it over in his hands. And a young receptionist who shakes her head and says no, we don't have any tea, sorry. Or beer. Or anything else for that matter. It's a clean machine. Oh dear.

The fans, too. Apple scruffs. About 30 of 'em, mostly girls. Not shouting or screaming, just talking and swapping faxes and info ("No, haven't been up to St John's Wood for a while. He's never there. Always up in Scotland.").

The door to reception is invitingly open but they're as obedient as novices. They don't move a muscle past that entrance, even though they know that Big G is somewhere around. Lots of self-control there; the pavement is as dry as a bone.

The mirror door, of course, has remained tantalisingly shut throughout, but... "will Sydney from the *Herald* come in next please?" It's more command than request, delivered in a voice midway between a gruff bark and a humorous Southern drawl. There's a glint of spectacles. Gathering recognition as the sandy hair, short and unfamiliar, registers. Take in the grey trousers and conventional shirt. Well, who'd have guessed it. The head disappears and Sydney walks in.

Do you like jokes? Jokes that are meant to be taken seriously, I mean. Because much later, when we find ourselves in the same room, we are shown a little metal box with a lid. It says: Box Of Smiles.

"Look inside," he urges. Hawk eyes behind the pale tints fastened on you.

Open up expecting a spring with a boxing glove. Instead, it's your own stony reflection in the shiny bottom surface. Obviously the first move in the game.

Anyway, he looks pleased. And she looked gleeful. The man from *The Times*, he says, was very sensitive. "He asked us to look in it before he would."

She is wearing hot pants, a tight top and uncomfortable-looking clogs as she sits behind the desk with him. Cigarette smoke curling past her sleek, dark hair. Creamy complexion. Hard, bright eyes like coal chips. What shall we say? A filmmaker, artist, and, some claim, vocalist.

He is a working class hero of 30; a vocalist, artist and, some claim, filmmaker. Desmond Morris, was it not, who called him the most important figure of the '60s.

She is excitable, garrulous, argumentative, nervous, intense and self-assured. He is funny, aggressive, sardonic, egomanic, rude, likeable and laconic.

He cuts into a conversation like a meat cleaver on a chopping block. She chatters frequently while he's talking. She is serious. He jokes. And often teases.

She: "I feel very lucky that I have a husband who understands these problems."

He: "Yes, dear."

She: "You know, he was in a very tough showbiz world."

He: "Yes, dear."

She: "Oh, come on!" [*Kisses him*]

He: "Hee hee. I wondered when you'd catch on."

You could say they got on well together. They may not be the world's sweethearts, but they're certainly this generation's Liz and Richard. All the best things come in pairs, you know. And this is the closest pair I've ever interviewed. They appear to be two halves of an indissoluble entity. Their answers and remarks intertwine and overlap like baton changes. This hand always knows what the other one is doing.

I was under the impression I was there to interview him. He is under the impression I am there to interview her. About her book which has just been reprinted. She's under that impression, too.

No matter. We talk about art.

He says, "Don't you think her work is surreal? The box? Or what about the book itself? I have a house full of her work. It's very far out. The first thing you do is come to a door and it says, 'This is not a door.' You go in the front door and walk up a ladder and look on a spy glass to a painting on a ceiling which says 'Yes'. Then you go into the room and you have to walk on a painting, and then into a room of her stuff. She's straight out of Duchamp, Dad, but she's now."

He says she calls what she does "con art", short for concept art, which takes the view that "the idea behind the piece is more important than whatever the piece of paper is." He thinks that as a way of life, her book stands up with the Bible and I Ching. "There are people – because this book came out ten years ago – whose whole way of life has changed. They go around performing the works. It's in the curriculum of many universities in America."

"It's another way of promoting our politics," she says. Of slowing down society. Selling *Grapefruit* is much more effective than carrying placards and marching down the street to bring peace.

These days he considers himself an artist in the all-embracing sense of the term rather than just a musician. The scope of the vision that was expressed in those early books, *In His Own Write* and *Spaniard In The Works*, has

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widened to take in the roles of lithographer, movie director and avant-garde music maker.

His film *Apotheosis*, which follows on from *Self Portrait* and *Rape*, was shown at the Cannes film festival and will open Edinburgh Festival. Its concept is simple. He draws a diagram on a sheet of paper, explaining [all] the while. It's film taken from a balloon which takes off from a field in an English village and ascends into the clouds. The soundtrack is the fading noise of dogs barking, a hunting horn and a gun being fired. When the balloon gets in the clouds, there's silence for five minutes. He talks scornfully of *Newsweek*, which he says dismissed it as "a 20-minute film in the clouds". That's rubbish, he exclaims.

His next movie is *Erection*, an almost-finished volume of nine months of still photographs of a hotel going up opposite the BEA Terminal in London's Cromwell Road. "I've just sent the rushes yesterday," he enthuses, "and it's fantastic. Over nine months the guy's been filming every day in the same position. It's gonna be the most famous film I ever do, I think."

In terms of music, John is now consciously seeking out the more avant-garde artists. He has great admiration for Fluxus, a group of 30 New York experimentalists whose founder member is George Macuinas. He's used Joe Jones from the group on his new album. Jones has assembled a Tone Deaf Music Company, which consists of a variety of musical instruments and electrical gadgets that play themselves. His toy violins were used as the string backing on *Imagine*, the new album.

What hurts and frustrates John is that he can achieve acceptance as an artist abroad and with such experimental groups, whereas here (in England) he is little more than an ex-Beatle.

"Most people in Britain think I'm somebody who won the pools, you know," he says drily, drawing on a Gauloise. "Won the pools and married a Hawaiian dancer or actress somewhere. Whereas in the States, we're treated like artists. Which we are! Or anywhere else for that matter," he added. "But here, it's like, the lad who knew Paul, got a lucky break, won the pools and married the actress.

"It's like 1940 here. I've just spent a couple of months in America and it's like coming back to Denmark or somewhere. It's really the sticks, you know. While in New York there's these fantastic 20 or 30 artists who understand what I'm doing and have the same kind of mind as me. It's just like heaven after being here. Oh, it's terrible. You've seen how they treat me in the press. There is an avant-garde here, but it's small."

"In Britain, I'm the lad who knew Paul, got a lucky break and married the actress. In the US, we're treated like artists"

But unlike him they were not generally well known, she ventured. She rose to his defence. The Beatles are pretty intelligent people but even they don't understand what he's talking about, she remarked. "John was always pretty isolated in a sense; he was very alone. And the avant-garde in London – I'm sorry to say this – but they are really sort of secondhand Fluxus. They all took after Fluxus. They all know Fluxus, they all read Fluxus and they're doing more or less the same thing."

Perhaps the reason for the refusal of the British to take him more seriously than they did lay in what they believed was just pure gimmickry and showmanship, I said, and referred to bagism and the nude album cover.

Oh come on, she expostulated. That's silly! But he is conscious of that attitude of conservatism. It's a stance that he seems to have been fighting all his life. He refutes it by referring back to Dadaism again. What they had been doing were events. In his eyes, the event of the Bed-In was one of the great happenings of this century. His logic is simple and sane: the fact that every Western world newspaper had as its front page that John and Yoko got married and went to bed. It's the world that is illogical, he suggests. It's a scream that two married people lying in bed can hit the news like that.

He relishes the memories: "When we took *Rape* to Vienna to show it on Austrian TV, we did a press conference in a bag and it was a fantastic experience for us and for the people that experienced it – whether they know it or not: askin' a bag what it's wearing underneath, and was it really us, and how're you getting on with Paul and that this bag's talking! They're all holding mics to the bag! It was beautiful."

John and Yoko talking to *Beat Instrumental* at Apple Records, London, July 19, 1971

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

'WHO THE HELL TOOK US TO COURT AND SHAT ALL OVER US IN PUBLIC?'

An open letter to Paul McCartney, from John Lennon

MELODY MAKER
DECEMBER 4, 1971

» MM DECEMBER 4, 1971

TWO WEEKS AGO, Paul McCartney talked to the *Melody Maker* about his new band and his relationship with Apple and the other three ex-Beatles. On Monday the *Melody Maker* received a letter to Paul from John Lennon in New York, with the request that we publish it on the grounds of giving "equal time" to his side of the story. John answers several points made by Paul in the interview. First, he refers to Paul's expressed desire to leave Apple, and to the problems of taxation, which that involves. Second, he refers to Paul's "warning" about Allen Klein. Third, to Paul's reference to the "bit of hype" on the *Let It Be* album cover, which Paul said was the first of its kind ever on a Beatles album. Fourth, to his current domicile in New York, and to Paul's comments about The Beatles playing live gigs, separately and together. Fifth, to Paul's remarks on John's latest album, *Imagine*. Sixth, to the McCartney comment that Klein had called a press conference to announce that Paul wouldn't play at the Bangla Desh concert – "Klein would have taken the credit" – and seventh, to Paul's intention to put his picture on the label of his Wings. Nine lines of the letter have been omitted by the *MM*, in deference to the laws of libel.

DEAR PAUL, LINDA ET ALL the wee McCartneys, thanks for your letter.

1. We give YOU MONEY for your bits of Apple. 2. We give YOU MORE MONEY in the form of royalties which legally belong to Apple (I know we're Apple, but on the other hand we're not.)

Maybe there's an answer there somewhere, but for the millionth time in these past few years I repeat, "What about the TAX?" It's all very well, playing 'simple honest ole Paul' in *Melody Maker* but you know damn well we can't just sign a bit of paper.

You say, "John won't do it." I will if you indemnify us against the tax man! Anyway, you know that after we have our meeting, the fucking lawyers will have to implement whatever we agree on, right?

If they have some form of agreement between them before we meet, it might make it even easier. It's up to you, as we've said many times, we'll meet whenever you like. Just make up your mind! Eg: two weeks ago I asked you on the phone, 'Please let's meet without advisors, etc. and decide what we want,' and I emphasised especially Maclen [*Lennon and McCartney's songwriting company*] which is mainly our concern, but you refused, right?

You said under no condition would you sell to us if we didn't do what you wanted, you'd sue us again and that Ringo and George are going to break you John, etc. Now I was quite straight with you that day, and you tried to shoot me down with your emotional "logic". If you're not the aggressor (as you claim) who the hell took us to court and shat all over us in public?

As I've said before, have you ever thought that you might possibly be wrong about something? Your conceit about us and Klein is incredible. You say you "made the mistake of trying to advise them against Klein and that pissed them off" and we secretly feel that you're right! Good God! You must know we're right about Eastman.

One other little lie in your "It's only Paulie" *MM* bit: *Let It Be* was not the first bit of hype on a Beatle album. Remember Tony Barrow? And his wonderful writing on "Please Please Me" etc etc. The early Beatle Xmas records! And you gotta admit it was a "new-phase" Beatle album, incidentally written in the style of the great Barrow himself! By the way, what happened to my idea of putting the parody of our first album cover on the *Let It Be* cover?

Also, we were intending to parody Barrow originally, so it was hype. But what is your Life article? Tony Barrow couldn't have done it better. (And your writing inside of the Wings album [*Wild Life*] isn't exactly the realist is it?) Anyway, enough of this petty bourgeois fun. You were right about New York! I do love it; it's the ONLY PLACE TO BE. (Apart from anything else, they leave you alone too! I see you prefer Scotland!) I'll bet you your piece of Apple you'll be living in New York by 1974 (two years is the usual time it takes you – right?).

Another thing, whadya mean big thing in Toronto? It was completely spontaneous. They rang on the Friday, we flew there, and we played on Saturday. I was sick because I was stone pissed. Listen to the album – with no rehearsal too. Come on Macca! Own up! We'd never played together before! Half a dozen live shows with no big fuss. In fact we've been doing what you've been three years. (I said it was daft for The Beatles to do it. I still think it's daft.) So go on and do it! Do it! Do it! Eg, Cambridge 1969, completely unadvertised! A very small hall. Lyceum Ballroom, 1969, no fuss, great show – 30-piece rock band! "Live Jam" out soon! Fillmore East, 1971, unannounced. Another good time had by all – out soon!! We even played in the streets here in the Village (our spiritual home!?) with the great David Peel!! We were moved on by the cops even!! It's best just to DO IT. I know you'll dig it, and they don't even expect The Beatles now anyway!

So you think "Imagine" ain't political? It's "Working Class Hero" with sugar on it for conservatives like yourself!! You obviously didn't dig the words. Imagine! You took "How Do You Sleep" so literally (read my own review of the album in *Crawdaddy*). Your politics are very similar to Mary Whitehouse's – "Saying nothing is as loud as saying something."

Listen my obsessive old pal, it was George's press conference – not "'date ole debil Klein". He said what you said – "I'd love to come, but..." Anyway, we did it for basically the same reasons – the Beatle bit – they still called it a Beatle show – with just two of them! Join the Rock Liberation Front before it gets you.

Wanna put your photo on the label like uncool John and Yoko, do ya? (Ain't ya got no shame!) If we're not cool, WHAT DOES THAT MAKE YOU. No hard feelings to you either. I know basically we want the same, and as I said on the phone and in this letter, whenever you want to meet, all you have to do is call.

All you need is love,
Power to the people,
Free all prisoners,
Jail the judges,
Love and peace,
Get it on and rip 'em off
John Lennon

PS: The bit that really puzzled us was asking to meet WITHOUT LINDA AND YOKO. I thought you'd have understood BY NOW that I'm JOHNANDYOKO

PPS: Even your own lawyers know you can't "just sign a bit of paper." (or don't they tell you?!)

> "Have you ever thought you might *possibly* be wrong about something?"

JEFFREY MAYER/WIREIMAGE

And would he call that art? Yes, he would. It was an event, communication. And art is communication. "Of course it's art! Look, Yoko says a woman can create, a man can destroy; but an artist revalues."

Yes, but what if it had been Fred and Elsie Smith in bed and not John and Yoko? He has an answer for that, too. "If Fred and Elsie Smith had done the Bed-In in Yorkshire, the *Yorkshire Post* would've done it and it might've been picked up by the *Daily Mail* or *Mirror*. I'm tellin' you, anybody could've done that bed event. If somebody suddenly appeared who had got married in a bag in the local church, it'd be everywhere! You see things like that. Who were those people...? Old Lady Docker and her husband used to be the last couple that had all the events in England. The English are famous eccentrics. I'm just another one from a long line of eccentrics."

Another thought occurred to him. "The Hanrattys [*the family of James Hanratty, hanged in 1962 after being found guilty – wrongly, they believed – of murder*] rang us up to ask for publicity – a lot of people say we jump in from like stamp collecting to yo-yos; we're consistent from 'All You Need Is Love' to 'Power To The People' – the Hanrattys asked us for publicity and we gave 'em as much as we could get 'em without the press losing interest. Every week Mr Hanratty goes to Hyde Park and talks on the corner about his problem and his son and all that. One week we sent the Rolls-Royce out with two people in the bag and we told everybody it was us. And all the papers went, it was in all the papers and the Hanrattys got more publicity – and we weren't even there! It was just a bag with two friends in!"

Nevertheless, I put it to him, the fact remained that the concept of an artist consistently going to the press and courting publicity seemed meretricious at times, totally at odds, as it were, with the public's idea of the artist commenting upon society while standing slightly outside it.

What about Warhol, then, he counters; the biggest publicity man in the world. Or Dalí. Or Duchamp. He stabs a finger at me and says you name one artist who isn't struggling to get publicity. The only one I can think of is Maciunas and they'e even persuaded him to put his name on the typography of the album.

He resents intensely being dismissed as just a circus act. Artists have always been the cenre of attention, and, for Chrissakes, this is the 20th Century you know!

"And they're responsible. Just as journalists are responsible for telling the news as it is, we are responsible for showing our pieces as they are, and any artist who doesn't do that part is lazy, a lazy egoist."

This view of "instant art" inevitably resembles propaganda at times. What could be more propagandist, after all, than "Power To The People"? It's a thinly veiled message to take up arms against The System, a call for revolution.

He agrees wholeheartedly with this evaluation. Sure it's propaganda. So was "All You Need Is Love". He's a revolutionary artist, he says, just as the poster painters in Cuba are. His art is dedicated to change and to the revolution. Art for art's sake is decadent. He's writing songs for the people to express themselves with. At the moratoriums in America 30,000 people sang "Give Peace A Chance". Twenty-odd thousand were singing "Power To The People" on the streets.

But Goebbels was also a propagandist, I say. You can make anything good, he rejoins. "Bread can be lousy. You can have gas to help get your teeth out, or to gas people with. It's ying yang or whatever they call it. If it wasn't for Goebbels you wouldn't have *Melody Maker* and its adverts, and you survive by adverts."

But adverts existed before Goebbels. "Yeah, but Goebbels finalised it into a fantastic art form. All modern advertising came from Goebbels. I mean, I'm not saying he's a hero, I'm just telling you what he did."

Wasn't it a dangerous practice, though, for music to be used as propaganda?

"Why?"

Because it implied it could also be used for a bad reason, I said.

He leaned forward in exasperation. That was like saying you don't make knives unless they kill with them. He made music for his own reasons first. "You can't blame me or the song. I'm not here to provide power to the people: I'm singin' about it. I'm the songwriter who sang the song about it that the people sang at the meetings they had. That's all. That's my job. Like if we're a community on an island, I'd be the singer. You might be the writer. Somebody would be the carpenter. Somebody else would be the cook. My function in society is to be an artist.

"You see, society is under the delusion that art is something you have extra, like crème de menthe or something. But societies don't exist with no artist. Art is a functional part of society. We're not some kind of decadent strip show that appears on the side. We're as important as prime ministers and policemen, So 'Power To The People' isn't expected to make a revolution. It's for people to sing like the Christians sing hymns.

"I like slogans, you know. I like advertising. I love the telly. I spent an afternoon talking to Tariq Ali and Robin Blackburn and we got to the point where my part in the revolution – what is the artist's part in a revolution, etc – was songwriting. And that night I just came out with 'Power To The People'. Same as the afternoon the *Oz* people came and said 'will you write us a song?' That night we wrote together 'God Save Oz' and changed it to "God Save Us", 'cause nobody understood it..."

It's the role of a musician, of course, that the majority of people relate to him, so the talk switches around to his last album. He thinks it will be around for a long time, that it can stand in any generation. He doesn't agree with me that it was rather masochistic. People, he says, think it's masochistic to take their clothes off.

"All I was doing was strippin' myself mentally and singin' about it. All poets have done that throughout the ages. I did it on 'Help'. It's the same kind of song. 'I'm A Loser' is the same. So is 'In My Life'. It's nothing that suddenly happened because of therapy; it was more condensed because I was doing therapy, that's all.

"Those songs are just the same style. Simple lyrics. They're all personal songs. My songs have always been like personalised diaries. I wrote these books, which are personalised diaries, or mostly in the first person or incomplete madness, and it's no different from that, except that it just happened to be an album about the same thing."

Was he very down when he made it, I ask. He shakes his head. He had been through the therapy and that wasn't all a downer, he says. It was just a simple fact.

"All I was saying was .'Yeah, me mummy left me, I think this about God'. It's just newspaper facts, you know – death in Venice and a volcano

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

Later bought by Ringo Starr, Tittenhurst Park, Lennon's home in Ascot, Berkshire was the set for the surrealist tea party vignette in Marc Bolan's 1972 Starr-directed feature *Born To Boogie*. Both Starr and Elton John had cameos in the film, which was released on The Beatles' Apple Films label

Lennon on a march to protest against the sentences handed out to Oz magazine editors, and also the internments of IRA suspects, London, August 11, 1971

in Israel, or whatever. I wasn't depressed when I made it 'cause I'd been up and down through through the therapy... It was just like... some days you're up, some days you're down, so when I was doing 'Mother' I was just making a record. It's when you don't express it, when you don't act out your madness – that's when you're insane and in pain and down."

By the same token his films and books are forms of therapy, as he believes all artists create through pain. "Just look at Dylan Thomas, Brendan Behan, anyone. They're always in great pain, artists. True artists produce through pain. The rest are just not artists."

"My songs have always been like personalised diaries, or mostly in the first person, or incomplete madness..."

I wondered if he had a general philosophy of life that he could expound on; he had said earlier that he was consistent in his madness. He had indeed, he replied. His philosophy was, in a nutshell, the existential one of "you are here". That had been the title, in fact, of a show he did at the Robert Fraser gallery two years ago when he met Yoko. All the Bibles, Jesuses, gurus, poets and artists, he claims, have ever said to people is that this minute is the one that counts; not tomorrow or yesterday.

"That's the whole game. There's no other time but the present. Anything else is a waste of time. Like Yoko says, most people spend so much time trying to be proper, they waste all their energy. People wonder where we get all our energy from. We're like children; we don't spend any time trying to be proper. That doesn't mean not dressing up in nice clothes – we like doing that – but being proper."

MICHAEL WATTS

JOE STEVENS

IMAGINE

A "sugar-coated" upgrade of *Plastic Ono Band*. Macca is bashed, Yoko is hymned, and the peace movement is gifted an enduring anthem…

BY GARRY MULHOLLAND

RELEASE DATE
8 OCTOBER 1971

IMAGINE IS OFTEN celebrated or damned as Lennon's return to generalist commercial pop writing after the stark personal confessions of *Plastic Ono Band*. In fact, it's nothing so contrived. Recorded in just nine days in 1971 at Lennon's Tittenhurst Park home, with a further couple of weeks recording strings, sax and overdubs in New York's Record Plant, *Imagine* is an eclectic, scruffy, casually confessional and occasionally cruel collection of AOR songs made into pop gold by the string arrangements and deft production of Phil Spector.

It also marked Lennon's return to working with George Harrison. With Harrison's snipes about Yoko apparently forgiven and 1970's *All Things Must Pass* comfortably the biggest commercial success thus far of the solo Beatles albums, the guitarist's presence on five of the ten tracks was An Event, and more than made up for the absence of Ringo Starr. Indeed, Ringo's absence was so keenly felt that Lennon had to replace him with three drummers, all of whom sound remarkably like Ringo.

The other Beatle makes an appearance, too… although not in the way he or we might have liked. It was in a furious response to a McCartney interview, in *Melody Maker* later in 1971, that Lennon made his own scrupulously honest and pretty accurate assessment of *Imagine*. McCartney had expressed the opinion that *Imagine* was better than Lennon's other efforts because it was less political. "So you think *Imagine* ain't political?" Lennon asks incredulously. "It's 'Working Class Hero' with sugar on it for conservatives like yourself!"

If that's so, then *Imagine* kicks off with the biggest sugar mountain in the history of protest rock. It's become hard to hear "Imagine", the song, beneath the din of 40 years of adoration as a global peace anthem and the competing shrieks of rabid loathing. But the first thing that strikes about "Imagine" is its clever sonic contrasts. A piano line, so simple and instantly memorable in its two-chord grace, given weight by the rough, booming and distorted way that the piano is

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1	Imagine	★★★
2	Crippled Inside	★★★
3	Jealous Guy	★★★★★
4	It's So Hard	★★
5	I Don't Want To Be A Soldier, Mama	★★★★
6	Gimme Some Truth	★★★★★
7	Oh My Love	★★★
8	How Do You Sleep?	★★★
9	How?	★★★★★
10	Oh Yoko!	★★★

- **Released:** September 9, 1971 (US), October 8, 1971 (UK)
- **Produced by:** John Lennon, Yoko Ono and Phil Spector
- **Recorded at:** Ascot Sound Studios (June 23, 1971 – July 5, 1971) and the Record Plant, New York (July 1971)
- **Personnel:** John Lennon (vocals, acoustic and electric guitars, piano, harmonica); John Barham (harmonium, keyboards, vibraphone); Steve Brendell (upright bass, maracas); King Curtis (saxophone); Andy Davis (acoustic guitar); Tom Evans (acoustic guitar); The Flux Fiddlers (strings); Jim Gordon (drums); George Harrison (electric guitar, slide guitar, dobro guitar); Nicky Hopkins (piano, electric piano); Jim Keltner (drums); Rod Linton (acoustic guitar); Joey Molland (acoustic guitar); Michael Pinder (tambourine); Phil Spector (backing vocals); John Tout (acoustic guitar, piano); Ted Turner (acoustic guitar); Klaus Voormann (bass); Alan White (drums, Tibetan cymbals, vibraphone)
- **Highest chart position:** UK 1; US 1

.imagine
john
lennon

.imagine
john
lennon

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IMAGINE
JOHN LENNON
PLASTIC ONO BAND
(with The Flux Fiddlers)
All Songs Published by Northern Songs. NCB
("An EMI Recording")
33 1/3
Mfd. In U.K.
Stereo
1A 062-04914
(5C 062-04914-A)
Side One
℗ 1971
STEMRA
1. IMAGINE (Lennon)
2. CRIPPLED INSIDE (Lennon) 2:59
3. JEALOUS GUY (Lennon) 3:43
4. IT'S SO HARD (Lennon) 4:10
5. I DON'T WANT TO BE A SOLDIER (Lennon) 2:22
6:01
Produced By: JOHN & YOKO and PHIL SPECTOR
Unauthorised Public Performance, Broadcasting and Copying of this Record Prohibited

John and Yoko at home in the grounds of Tittenhurst Park, near Ascot, 1971

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

"Lennon's won, hands down. Evil and rude and just darned great... He's right there again, and it's brilliant" *Roy Hollingworth, Melody Maker, Oct 8, 1971*

"One of the best – if not the best – albums of the year. Timeless and memorable and very much unlike the Lennon we have come to know and love" *Gavin Petrie, Disc And Music Echo, October 2, 1971*

recorded. The way this undercuts The Flux Fiddlers' sentimental strings. How Lennon's voice is in a key which forces him to sound vulnerable and fey, as if he's well aware of how pretentious and condescending the song will sound if he allows himself to swagger.

Though the "*Imagine no possessions*" line will always stick in the craw of those who felt that that was easy for him to say, and who insist that all hippy millionaire rock stars are essentially hypocritical, it doesn't feel, after 40 years, like the most relevant point of the message. As opposing gods have replaced opposing economic systems as the leading excuse for acts of irrational blood-letting, the lines "*Nothing to kill or die for/And no religion, too*" still ring out as rebellion. Coupled with the first verse's dismissal of reward or damnation in the afterlife, it was a risky stance from a man who had felt the full record-burning wrath of the American Bible Belt throughout the 'Bigger Than Jesus' furore. Here, atheism is not an absence of faith, but a faith in humanity and The Now; a spur to take personal responsibility for the world's ills, and unite against cynicism, which is given a graceful substance in the opening lines of the refrain: "*You may say I'm a dreamer/ But I'm not the only one*."

Sure, the implication that all we have to do is dream and Utopia will be realised in our time is not terribly useful, politically speaking. But, just in case you were under any illusions otherwise, as a politician, John Lennon was a really great singer-songwriter. For a modern pop song to acquire the status of hymn, it would have to be more spiritual panacea than call-to-arms. And that's exactly what "Imagine" is.

The ramshackle eclecticism is quickly established by the following "Crippled Inside". One of the most curiously inappropriate songs in the Lennon canon, it hides a withering attack on conservative values within a cornball country-rock hoedown. Whether its insistence that everything from putting on make-up to being a racist is proof of profound psychological damage is aimed at Every Reactionary or a specific person, or whether the asides to "*babe*" and "*mamma*" are bitch-baiting or just rock'n'roll poetic licence, the song doesn't quite resolve the goodtimey fun of the music with the lofty cruelty of the words. What does work is the interplay of Nicky Hopkins' barrelhouse piano, Lennon's rockabilly licks and George Harrison's bluesy dobro, complete with blistering solo. The words recede into irrelevance as the sheer pleasure of the players carries the song towards something loveable.

"Jealous Guy", which had originally surfaced as "Child Of Nature" during the Beatles' excursion to India in 1968, is a more measured return to the essence of Lennon's key pop subversion years; revisiting his skill at smuggling bitter themes into the superficially buoyant music of a "Help!", "I'm A Loser" or "Norwegian Wood". The melody,

GEORGE KONIG/SHUTTERSTOCK

string arrangement, piano and plaintive vocal are pure pop romance. The lyric is weaselly emotional blackmail, desperate psychobabble and the kind of neediness that would send stronger women than Yoko Ono running to the nearest women's shelter.

When Lennon, at the song's fade, adlibs "*Watch out*" and "*Look out, babe*" you wonder, again, if it's the language of rock or potential threat. But none of this is criticism of song or stance.

Lennon captures a truth about men in love and the childishness inherent in being possessive – and the temper and violence that underlies that level of immaturity – with such elegance on "Jealous Guy" that Elvis Costello went on to forge an entire career out of excavating the theme. All that, and one of the best heartbreak chord changes in pop, perfectly framing the line, "I began to lose control." "Jealous Guy" is Lennon at the top of his game, fitting music to imagery, art to heart, with the wit of a Gershwin or Porter.

Lennon's love of metallic rhythm'n'blues re-emerges on "It's So Hard", a two-and-a-half minute list song that harks back, sonically, to "I Want You (She's So Heavy)", "Cold Turkey" and even a hint of The Beatles' version of "Dizzy Miss Lizzy" from *Help!*. This tough, but somewhat plodding, rocker is a neat double entendre revolving round the line "*Sometimes I feel like going down*", whereby the daily grind of competition and anxiety leads Lennon to one kind of going down, before holding his baby in his arms inspires a whole different and better kind. The last verse punchline about keeping "*your woman satisfied*" but "*it's really hard*" could be a running joke, macho boast or confession of sexual terror, depending on how you take the double-meaning of "*hard*" and the strategically placed "*but*". King Curtis' sax feels disconnected and superfluous, and leads to the conclusion that "It's So Hard" is *Imagine*'s least satisfying track. Pun intended.

No problem, because the climax of the old vinyl Side One is altogether less of a dry-hump. "I Don't Want To Be A Soldier Mama" is one of swamp-rock's earliest marvels; a six-minute deep-blues jam, given shape by another Lennon list and a claustrophobic voodoo groove shaped by a 10-piece band – including Harrison on slide. There's an essay to be written on the role that the word "Well" plays in Lennon's singing, and here he dredges the word up from some place in his stomach where Jerry Lee Lewis has moved in and is doing unspeakable things to his entrails. Despite the title, this is not really an anti-war song – Lennon replaces "*soldier*" with "*failure*", "*lawyer*" and "*churchman*", just to spread the dread out equally among all his *bêtes noires*.

"Gimme Some Truth" is the perfect contrast, all that garage band majesty transformed from swampy insularity to self-righteous punk rock ranting and the glistening twin guitars of Harrison and Lennon. There's a lot of essence of Beatles on *Imagine*, but nowhere more than this refugee from the *Let It Be* sessions, as Alan White impersonates Ringo with military precision and power, and Harrison finds that high, keening, "Drive My Car" sound for the solo. Perhaps that's why this quintessential snapshot of pre-Watergate paranoia isn't seen as one of Lennon's Premier League protest songs – it's just too damn much of a joy to listen to. Lennon's "*No short-sighted, yellow-bellied, son-of-Tricky Dicky*" bridge reminds that he always had potential as a rapper before the fact.

That rarest of things: a superstar's best-selling album that also sounds like it was most fun to make...

"Oh My Love" is the first of two Yoko tributes that would come over as pure camp if they weren't so patently sincere. Led by Lennon's quasi-classical piano line and buoyed by a lovely, halting bridge that recalls the sighing bierkeller soul of "Girl", "Oh My Love" surely softens the heart of the hardest Yoko hater.

And speaking of hatred... "How Do You Sleep?" is notorious as the song where Lennon unleashes his fury at McCartney. Rightly so: one can understand why The Beatles' contemporaries, who saw the band's split as the symbolic end of '60s optimism, hated to hear the two head boys spitting at each other in public.

To recap, The Beatles were still battling over money and Allen Klein, with Paul set against the other three. Tensions between Lennon and McCartney weren't exactly helped when he suspected – correctly – that a couple of snippy lines on "Too Many People" from Macca's *Ram* album were directed at he and Yoko. Hence the postcard in initial copies of *Imagine* featuring a snap of Lennon holding a pig by the ears in mock tribute to McCartney holding a sheep on the cover of *Ram*. And hence "How Do You Sleep?"

Musically, the song is a clever but overlong pastiche of Lennon's late-period Beatles ballads, with a bluesy foundation adorned by queasy strings. Lyrically, it's a right old savaging, accusing his former partner of being henpecked, making 'muzak' and being surrounded by sycophants, among other things. How McCartney ever took the "*the only thing you done was yesterday*" line literally, which he seemed to at the time, remains a mystery, when it's obviously a neat pun fingering McCartney as a musical spent force, using Macca's "*Another Day*" as the rhyming evidence.

Lennon switches to much bigger questions with the Janov/Primal Scream therapy-inspired "How?" Replacing the literal screams of *Plastic Ono Band* with an exhausted pondering of the questions that can't be resolved by self-analysis, it's a beautiful ballad in which Lennon's search for peace is explicitly accepted as universal. By the final verse, the "*I*" is replaced with "*We*", and Lennon's plaintive enquiry into how humanity can possibly move forward when "*We don't know which way we're facing*" has become a deeply moving example of how Lennon could often make the personal into the political.

All of which makes the dippy "Oh Yoko!" an anti-climactic ending. Another jaunty Dylan-goes-country shuffle, it feels like Lennon is royally taking the piss when he announces, with flat Liverpudlian vowels: "*In the middle of a baath/In the middle of a baath I call your name.*" What "Oh Yoko!" does do is that classic album thing of wiping out all that's gone before it, so that, when you put it back to the beginning, it feels all fresh and new.

Imagine is that rarest of things: a superstar's best-selling album that also sounds like the album that was most fun to make. It feels as if Lennon and his close friends threw some shit at the wall to see what stuck, and reacted with happy amazement when most of it did. If *Imagine* is dominated, in the media sense, by its title track, that only means many who've bought it for "Imagine" over the years have likely been surprised, intrigued and delighted by the music that exists in the shadow of Lennon's most famous three minutes.

YOKO ON... "IMAGINE"

"That song was played so many times in so many places... I know that cynics feel like, 'Ah, he's saying "*Imagine no possessions*", and he was the one who had so much, ah ha ha,' but he sincerely wished that there would be a time when all of us could feel happy without getting too obsessive about material goods and all that... In those days, there was only, I think, a small group of people, intellectuals, who were talking about world peace and had pamphlets you couldn't read because they were so wordy."

SOME TIME IN NEW YORK CITY

You say you want a revolution… A series of politically charged newsflashes from the NYC nerve centre. BY JOHN LEWIS

RELEASE DATE
16 SEPTEMBER 1972

IT'S NOT CLEAR how or when John Lennon became politicised. Liverpool, for all its reputation for militancy in the 1980s, was not traditionally a radical hotspot. Lennon grew up in an apolitical family in a fairly comfortable suburb which was then a safe Conservative constituency (Liverpool Garston). He even played many of his early Quarrymen and Beatles gigs in local Conservative Party halls, and you can search the biogs and Beatle books in vain for any evidence of Lennon's early political radicalism.

Opposition to the US involvement in Vietnam appeared to be a galvanising force.

In 1969 he returned his MBE to Buckingham Palace, citing the UK government's support of US foreign policy, as well as the its tacit involvement in "the Nigeria-Biafra thing". In the same year he joined the campaign to award a posthumous pardon to James Hanratty, hanged for murder in 1962 on what many considered flimsy evidence. A year later he was leading his campaign of "violent pacifism" (bed-ins, bagism) and supporting a dubious black British community leader called Michael X, who would later be hanged for murder in Trinidad. In his final weeks in London, he was marching at a rally, holding a placard that read "Victory For The IRA Against British Imperialism".

Politics started to creep into his material throughout this period. "Revolution 1" was followed by other nebulous anthems: "Give Peace A Chance", "Power To The People" and "Happy Xmas (War Is Over)". Only on the "Imagine" single, which his friend Tariq Ali described as "the Communist Manifesto set to music", and its flipside "Working Class Hero" did some ordered political thinking emerge.

Lennon's arrival in New York, in August 1971, amplified this political engagement. He had chosen to settle in a country ripped apart by the Vietnam War; more pertinently, he had chosen a city awash with identity politics – a diverse rainbow coalition of feminists, Civil Rights activists, gay organisations,

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 | Woman Is The Nigger Of The World ★★★
2 | Sisters O Sisters ★★
3 | Attica State ★★★
4 | Born In A Prison ★★★
5 | New York City ★★★★
6 | Sunday Bloody Sunday ★★★
7 | The Luck Of The Irish ★★★
8 | John Sinclair ★★★★
9 | Angela ★★★
10 | We're All Water ★★

DISC 2

1 | Cold Turkey (Live) ★★★
2 | Don't Worry Kyoko (Live) ★★★★
3 | Well (Baby Please Don't Go) (Live) ★★★
4 | Jamrag (Live) ★★★
5 | Scumbag (Live) ★★★
6 | Au (Live) ★★★

2005 CD REISSUE BONUS TRACKS

Listen, The Snow Is Falling ★★★
Happy Xmas (War Is Over) ★★★★

The CD reissue omits much of the Zappa/Mothers live material on the original vinyl release

- **Released:** September 15, 1972 (UK), June 12, 1972 (US)
- **Produced by:** John Lennon, Yoko Ono & Phil Spector
- **Recorded at:** The Record Plant, New York (November 1971–March 1972)
- **Personnel:** John Lennon (guitars, vocals); Yoko Ono (drums, vocals); Jim Keltner (drums, percussion); Klaus Voormann (bass). Elephant's Memory: Stan Bronstein (flute, saxophone); Wayne 'Tex' Gabriel (guitar); Richard Frank Jr (drums, percussion); Adam Ippolito (keys, piano); Gary Van Scyoc (bass)
- **Highest chart position:** UK 11; US 48

TO KNOW HIM IS TO LOVE HIM

Some Time in New York City

LATE CITY EDITION

WEATHER: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Established 1984

ONO NEWS THAT'S FIT TO PRINT

There are no birds in Viet-Nam —ACE

JOKO PRESS

John & Yoko/ Plastic Ono Band

With Elephant's Memory

Plus Invisible Strings

SISTERS, O SISTERS

Ono

We lost our green land
We lost our clean air
We lost our true wisdom
And we live in despair.

Sisters, O sisters
Lets stand up right now
It's never too late
To start from the start.

Wisdom, O Wisdom
That's what we ask for
And yes, my dear sisters
We must learn to ask.

Middle 8:

Wisdom, O Wisdom
That's what we ask for
That's what we live for now.

Sisters, O sisters
Let's wake up right on
It's never too late
To shout from our hearts.

Freedom, O Freedom
That's what we fight for
And yes, my dear sisters
We must learn to fight.

Middle 8:

Freedom, O Freedom
That's what we ask for
That's what we live for now.

Sisters, O sisters
Let's give up no more
It's never too late
To build a new world.

New world, O New world
That's what we live for
And yes, my dear sisters
We must learn to live.

Middle 8:

New world, O New world
That's what we live for
That's what we must learn
to build.

New world, O New world
That's what we live for
That's what we must learn
to build.

ANGELA

Lennon/Ono

Angela, they put you in
prison
Angela, they shot down
your man
Angela, you're one of the
millions of political
prisoners in the world.

Sister, there's a wind that
never dies
Sister, we're breathing
together
Sister, our love and hopes
forever keep
on moving oh so slowly
in the world.

Angela, can you hear the
earth is turning?
Angela, the world
watches you.

Angela, you soon will be
returning to your sisters and
brothers of the world.

Sister, you're still a people
teacher
Sister, your word reaches far
Sister, there's a million
different races but we all
share the same future
in the world.

Chorus:
They gave you sunshine
They gave you sea
They gave you everything but
the jailhouse key.
They gave you coffee
They gave you tea
They gave you everything
but equality.

SEE: "WOMAN IS THE NIGGER OF THE WORLD..."

Woman is the Nigger of the World

Lennon/Ono

Woman is the nigger of
the world
Yes she is...think about it
Woman is the nigger of
the world
Think about it...do
something about it.

We make her paint her
face and dance

If she won't be a slave, we
say that she don't love us
If she's real, we say she's
trying to be a man
While putting her down we
pretend that she's above us
Woman is the nigger of the
world...yes she is
If you don't believe me, take a
look at the one you're with
Woman is the slave of
the slaves
Ah, yeh...better scream
about it.
We make her bear and raise
our children
And then we leave her flat for
being a fat old mother hen
We tell her home is the only
place she should be
Then we complain that she's
too unworldly to be
our friend
Woman is the nigger of the
world...yes she is
If you don't believe me, take a
look at the one you're with
Woman is the slave to
the slaves
Yeh (think about it).

We insult her every day on TV
And wonder why she has no
guts or confidence
When she's young we kill her
will to be free
While telling her not to be so
smart we put her down for
being so dumb

Woman is the nigger of
the world
Yes she is...if you don't
believe me, take a look at
the one you're with
Woman is the slave to
the slaves
Yes she is...if you believe me,
you better scream about it.

Repeat:
We make her paint her
face and dance.
We make her paint her
face and dance.
We make her paint her
face and dance.

WE'RE ALL WATER

Ono

There may be not much
difference
Between Chairman Mao and
Richard Nixon
If we strip them naked.

There may be not much
difference
Beween Marilyn Monroe and
Lenny Bruce
If we check their coffins.

There may be not much
difference
Between White House and
Hall of People
If we count their windows.

There may be not much
difference
Between Raquel Welch and
Jerry Rubin
If we hear their heartbeat.

Chorus:
We're all water from
different rivers
That's why it's so easy to meet
We're all water in this vast,
vast ocean
Someday we'll evaporate
together.

There may be not much
difference
Between Eldridge Cleaver and
Queen of England
If we bottle their tears.

There may be not much
difference
Between Manson and the Pope
If we press their smile.

There may be not much
difference
Between Rockefeller and you
If we hear you sing.

There may be not much
difference
Between you and me
If we show our dreams.

Chorus:
We're all water from
different rivers
That's why it's so easy to meet
We're all water in this vast,
vast ocean
Someday we'll evaporate
together.

The entire world is a musical instrument, the pole of the world celestial is intersected where this heavenly chord is divided by the spiritual sun. Earthly music is an echo of this cosmic harmony. It is a relic of heaven—*UNKNOWN*

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SOME TIME IN NEW YORK CITY — LATE CITY EDITION

The Luck of the Irish

JOHN SINCLAIR

Lennon

BORN IN A PRISON

Ono

New York City

Lennon

ATTICA STATE

Lennon/Ono

SUNDAY BLOODY SUNDAY

Lennon/Ono—Feb. 1972

Dining out in New York City, 1972

BERND LUBOWSKI/ULLSTEIN BILD VIA GETTY IMAGES

prisoner rights groups and so on. These had little in common with the orthodox Marxism with which Lennon had flirted in London.

Even the organised groups which quickly got their claws into John and Yoko – Bobby Seale's Black Panthers, Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin's Yippies – might have espoused vague talk of "revolution", but all had amorphous agendas that defied orthodox political alignment, lurching from Maoist to libertarian, via interventionism and beyond.

Many of Lennon and Ono's songs for *Some Time In New York City* were initially written for some of these single-issue causes in their first few months in New York. "John Sinclair" was for the MC5 henchman of the same name, leader of the self-styled "White Panthers". Sinclair had received a preposterous 10-year sentence for trying to sell two marijuana joints to an undercover policewoman. Lennon and his band debuted the song at the Ten For Two rally in Ann Arbor, near Detroit, on December 10, 1971 (two days later Sinclair was freed on bail).

At the same gig they also premiered "Attica State", a tribute to the 28 prisoners killed at a riot at upstate New York's Attica Correctional Facility four months earlier. A week later, John and Yoko were surprise guests at a benefit for the bereaved relatives of those prisoners, held at the Harlem Apollo. Here Lennon performed "Attica State" and also premiered another newly minted protest song, "Angela", inspired by the Black Panther Angela Davis.

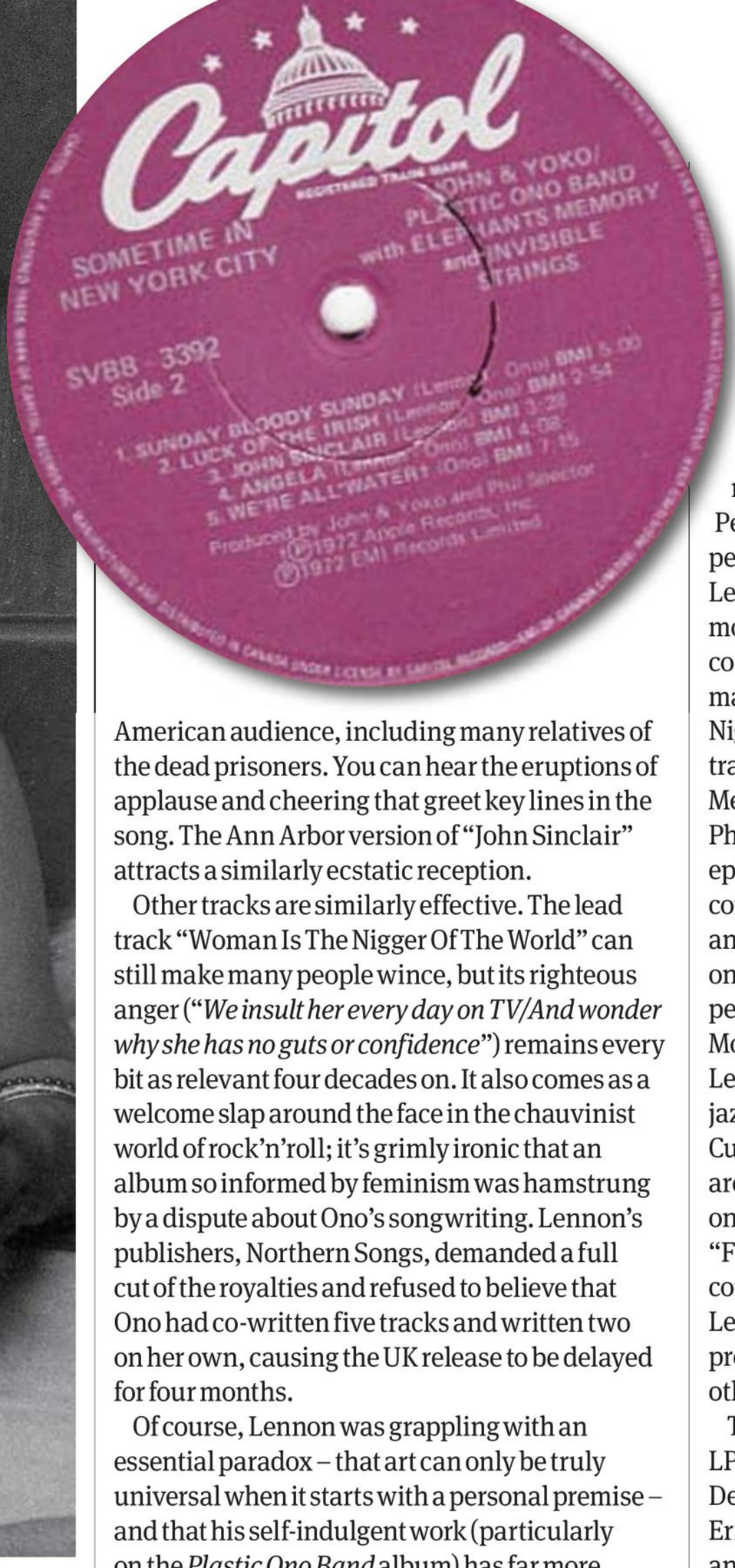
Lennon later said that *Some Time In New York City* – all four vinyl sides of it – was motivated by personal rather than commercial necessity. "We didn't have to make it," he says. "We could have sat on *Imagine* for a year and a half. But the things were coming out of our minds and we just wanted to share our thoughts with anybody who wanted to listen." He described this phase of protest song as a form of journalism. "It was done," he says, "in a tradition of minstrels – singing reporters – who sang about their times and what was happening."

This delighted Yippie leaders, Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, who had been looking for rock'n'roll's Woody Guthrie-style guerrilla troubadour now that they'd "lost" Dylan. Lennon had earlier said: "I make singles like broadsheets", and the cover art to *Some Time In New York City* literalises this metaphor. It's a pastiche of a broadsheet paper – even mimicking the fonts of *The New York Times* – with each song presented as a news headline, and with the lyrics listed as the story.

"New York City" – a narrative poem that serves as a sequel to "The Ballad Of John And Yoko" – pretty much fills in the background to the album almost as succinctly as the theme music to *The Beverly Hillbillies* or *The Brady Bunch* explain the backstories to those shows. It tells us how, within hours of John and Yoko's arrival in New York, they meet Jerry Rubin "*on the corner*" (under the arch at Washington Square). They also meet hippy scenester David Peel, frontman of agitprop outfit The Lower East Side (Lennon produces his album, *The Pope Smokes Dope*, as mentioned in the song). Peel takes them to Max's Kansas City, the music venue and restaurant, where Lennon is impressed by the bar-room blues of an outfit called Elephant's Memory, whom he invites to be his backing band. John and Yoko, initially staying in a high-end uptown hotel, move into a modest basement flat in Greenwich Village (155 Bank Street), where they hold court with various countercultural icons. They also ditch their Rolls-Royce and instead get around the city on bicycles.

New York is, to Lennon's surprise, a place where they can remain anonymous ("*No-one came to bug us/Hustle us or shove us/So we decide to make it our home*"). "New York City" is the one purely personal song on an album otherwise dominated by issue-based political anthems.

The best protest songs, by their nature, are rarely subtle, nuanced or carefully argued. They are not written to challenge anyone's assumptions, but to test commitment. They are simple rallying cries, which reduce complex arguments to slogans of righteous indignation. Many of the songs on *Some Time...* prove that Lennon could be brilliant at this. Sceptics should hear the version of "Attica State" performed at the Harlem Apollo in front of a primarily African-



American audience, including many relatives of the dead prisoners. You can hear the eruptions of applause and cheering that greet key lines in the song. The Ann Arbor version of "John Sinclair" attracts a similarly ecstatic reception.

Other tracks are similarly effective. The lead track "Woman Is The Nigger Of The World" can still make many people wince, but its righteous anger ("*We insult her every day on TV/And wonder why she has no guts or confidence*") remains every bit as relevant four decades on. It also comes as a welcome slap around the face in the chauvinist world of rock'n'roll; it's grimly ironic that an album so informed by feminism was hamstrung by a dispute about Ono's songwriting. Lennon's publishers, Northern Songs, demanded a full cut of the royalties and refused to believe that Ono had co-written five tracks and written two on her own, causing the UK release to be delayed for four months.

Of course, Lennon was grappling with an essential paradox – that art can only be truly universal when it starts with a personal premise – and that his self-indulgent work (particularly on the *Plastic Ono Band* album) has far more resonance than his attempts at universality. Here it's left to Yoko Ono to bridge that paradox on "Born In A Prison", an attempt to link the personal with the political. "*We cry in a prison/We love in a prison/We dream in a prison like fools*", she sings over a smooth, waltzing beat.

"The Luck Of The Irish" is a clumsier effort. The song starts in a bitter, sardonic tone that suits Lennon, wittily turning a cliché on its head ("*If you had the luck of the Irish/You'd be sorry and wish you were dead/You should have the luck of the Irish/And you'd wish you were English instead*"). But this is quickly undermined by Yoko's bridge sections, a risible litany of Auld Oirish stereotypes: "*Shamrock all over the world... Let's walk over rainbows like leprechauns... The world would be one big Blarney Stone...*"

Lennon's spiky invective is more suited to its companion piece "Sunday Bloody Sunday", written only weeks after the events in Derry on January 30, 1972, when 14 unarmed protesters were shot dead by the British Army. While even Martin McGuinness might blanche at some of the assertions ("*You Anglo pigs and Scotties sent to colonise the North*"), it's helped by a spirited funk rock jam, where Yoko's eerie banshee wail on the chorus conjures up curious similarities with The Specials' "Ghost Town".

Indeed, what's compelling about *Some Time In New York City* is how Lennon allies his anthems to unlikely musical backdrops. Where so many protest songs are, musically speaking, little more than nursery rhymes ("Give Peace A Chance" being a perfect example), here Lennon shows how even the most militant politics can be co-opted into the pop mainstream. "Woman Is The Nigger Of The World" is transformed by Elephant's Memory (and by producer Phil Spector) into a slice of epic bubblegum pop, complete with lush strings and a honking horn section; it also provokes one of Lennon's most impassioned vocal performances. "John Sinclair" is an Ozark Mountain-style bluegrass anthem, written by Lennon on a dobro; "Angela" is a dreamy smooth jazz ballad that wouldn't sound out of place on a Curtis Mayfield album; "Attica State" is based around a tasty slide-guitar lick (the exact same one that Lennon plays on George Harrison's "For You Blue" on *Let It Be*). And "New York City" could be the finest straight-up rock'n'roll song of Lennon's solo career, with Elephant's Memory providing a swing and a muscle lacking from any other Lennon albums.

Tagged on to the original release was another LP of live sessions. The first side is taken from a December 15 1969 gig at London's Lyceum (with Eric Clapton, George Harrison, Billy Preston and others) and features two songs: an impassioned eight-and-a-half-minute reading of "Cold Turkey" and an astonishing 13-minute Yoko Ono version of "Don't Worry Kyoko", a mournful caterwaul of despair after losing custody of her first child, Kyoko. Here she sounds remarkable; screaming, yelping, howling and ululating over a blues-funk jam.

On side four of the vinyl LP you'll find four tracks recorded with Frank Zappa's Mothers Of Invention at New York's Fillmore East on June 6, 1971. A mixture of Can-like tribal funk, avant-garde howling and Indo-jazz fusion reminiscent of Miles Davis' *On The Corner* or Alice Coltrane's *Universal Consciousness*, it's certainly far more of a Zappa gig than a Lennon one, and Zappa was rightly angry at the way Lennon appropriated the recordings. He even initiated legal action, and the session was removed from the CD reissues (although alternate mixes of the same gig tapes can be found on Zappa's *Playground Psychotics* album). The sonic radicalism of the live disc is certainly as interesting as the lyrical radicalism on the first two sides of the album.

Some Time In New York City was not a success. Its only single, "Woman Is The Nigger Of The World", failed to chart in the UK and scraped to No 57 in the US; although a truncated version of it featured on the first Lennon best-of, *Shaved Fish*, neither it nor any of the other tracks appeared on subsequent Lennon compilations. It spawned no cover versions, and remained out of print for more than two decades.

Partly it's because these were not popular or fashionable causes. Musicians are allowed to campaign for global peace, feeding the hungry or saving the environment. But supporting prisoner rights, the Black Panthers, radical feminists and drug users was tricky for one of the world's biggest pop stars. In particular, Lennon's somewhat naïve support for "*the kids and the IRA*" was beyond the pale for most of his British audience – even in these early days of "The Troubles", before Bloody Sunday, the Provos had been responsible for more than 70 murders in Northern Ireland throughout 1971, alienating even those on the hard left.

Still, nobody else was writing songs about these issues, and if just a tiny proportions of Lennon's millions of fans became aware of Angela Davis and the nature of her struggle, or about government-sanctioned violence, or about political prisoners, then so much the better. As the first high-profile celebrity couple to be thoroughly transformed by second-wave feminism, it's difficult to underestimate John and Yoko's contributions.

Was Lennon being exploited? The US broadcaster, Geraldo Rivera, a friend of Lennon's during this period, claims that John and Yoko "were putty in the hands of professional revolutionaries" such as Hoffman, Rubin and Seale, who used the couple to their own ends. Indeed, it's easy to dismiss Lennon's political period as an example of "radical chic". Albert Goldman, in his scabrous biography *The Lives Of John Lennon*, almost chortles with glee as he lists how Lennon was forced to recant his principles in the fight against deportation.

Still, one suspects that the full power of the US security services was being used against Lennon because they saw him as a threat, as someone who had the power to influence millions of young Americans. Lennon's phone was bugged, he was being tailed by government agents, was threatened with deportation and was the subject of a 300-page CIA dossier. It certainly adds a frisson to the album – and grants him a political significance that few other pop stars can claim.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

"There's almost nothing that isn't redeemed by some major touch of great ability. And John Lennon has the guts to risk offending when really he still wants to be loved..." *Richard Williams, Melody Maker, Oct 7, 1972*

"I like the first disc very much. Every track is entertaining, either from a musical or lyrical point of view. The second disc is OK if you're out of your mind, but otherwise it takes some getting into..." *Simon Stable, NME, September 30, 1972*

Here Lennon shows how even the most militant politics can be co-opted into the pop mainstream...

LIVE IN NEW YORK CITY

From August 1972, his last-ever headlining show. Rock's greatest frontman, or a nervous wreck? "We'll get it right next time…"

BY JOHN LEWIS

RELEASE DATE
10 FEBRUARY 1986

IN MALCOLM GLADWELL'S bestseller *Outliers: The Story Of Success*, Gladwell tries to rationalise how people become "geniuses". He concludes that many high achievers –athletes, musicians, composers, artists, billionaire software designers – have succeeded not just because they were in the right place at the right time, but because they spent the requisite 10,000 hours working on their craft. John Lennon's genius, claims Gladwell, was predicated on him spending thousands upon thousands of hours playing with The Beatles in Liverpool and Hamburg. His songwriting nous was boosted by learning an inventory of countless old showtunes and rock'n'roll songs, while his showmanship and stage presence was honed by performing five-hour sets for drunken squaddies.

It's curious, then, that only a few years after leaving Hamburg, Lennon seemed to have run his course as a live artist. The Beatles never toured after an August 1966 date at Candlestick Park, San Francisco. Whereas his contemporaries – Jagger, Daltrey, Davies, Winwood, even eventually McCartney – made that transition from the variety hall to the football stadium, Lennon's cocksure braggadocio never really found a home in the larger arena. His few live performances as a solo artist show an oddly nervous showman: apologetic, shy, desperately unsure of himself.

Indeed, you can count the number of shows that Lennon played after Candlestick Park on the fingers of two hands. In January 1969 he joined The Beatles on the roof of the Apple building in Savile Row. Two months later he and Yoko performed with two freeform jazz musicians at Lady Mitchell Hall in Cambridge; in September he fronted the Plastic Ono Band in Toronto and, in December, led another Plastic Ono Band lineup at London's Lyceum. In June 1971, he and Yoko briefly guested with Frank Zappa and the Mothers Of Invention at New York's Fillmore East, and in December 1971 John, Yoko and Elephant's Memory Band played short sets at two benefits, one at Ann Arbor, Michigan, to campaign for John Sinclair's release, another at the CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 | New York City ★★★★
2 | It's So Hard ★★★
3 | Woman Is The Nigger Of The World ★★★
4 | Well Well Well ★★★
5 | Instant Karma! (We All Shine On) ★★★★
6 | Mother ★★★★
7 | Come Together ★★★★
8 | Imagine ★★★
9 | Cold Turkey ★★★★
10 | Hound Dog ★★
11 | Give Peace A Chance ★★

- **Released:** February 10, 1986
- **Produced by:** Yoko Ono
- **Recorded live at:** Madison Square Garden, New York (August 30, 1972)
- **Personnel:** John Lennon (vocals, rhythm guitar, keyboards); Yoko Ono (keyboards); Jim Keltner (drums); Wayne 'Tex' Gabriel (lead guitar); Gary Van Scyoc (bass guitar); Stan Bronstein (saxophone); Adam Ippolito (keyboards); Richard Frank Jr (drums)
- **Highest chart position:** UK 55; US 41

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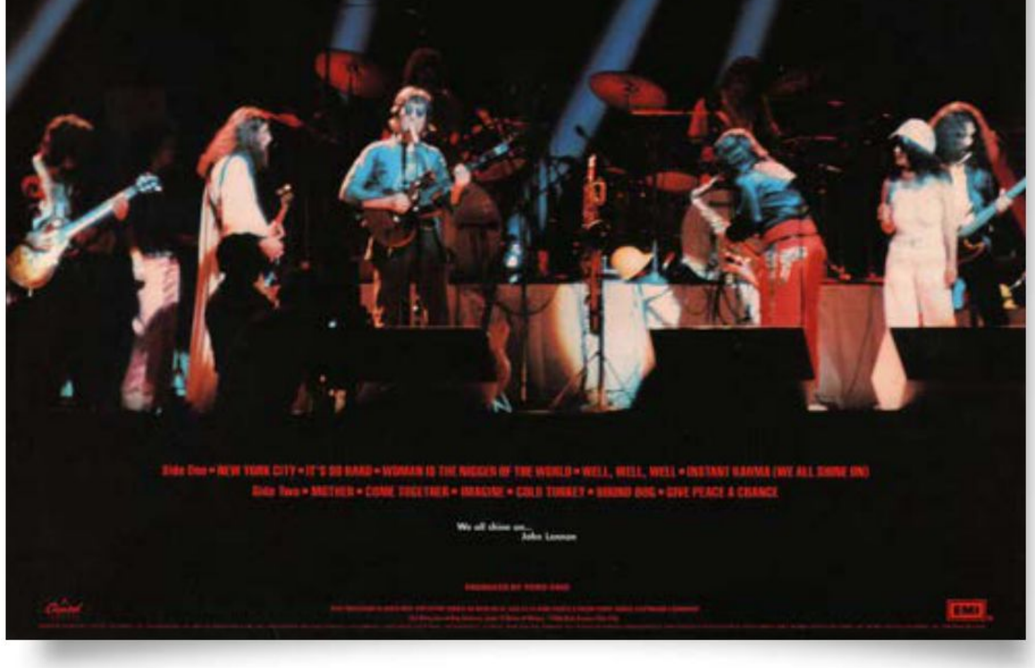
JOHN
LENNON
LIVE
IN
NEW YORK
CITY


JOHN LENNON
LIVE
IN NEW YORK CITY
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Side One • NEW YORK CITY • IT'S SO HARD • WOMAN IS THE NIGGER OF THE WORLD • WELL, WELL, WELL • INSTANT KARMA (WE ALL SHINE ON)
Side Two • MOTHER • COME TOGETHER • IMAGINE • COLD TURKEY • HOUND DOG • GIVE PEACE A CHANCE
We all shine on,
John Lennon
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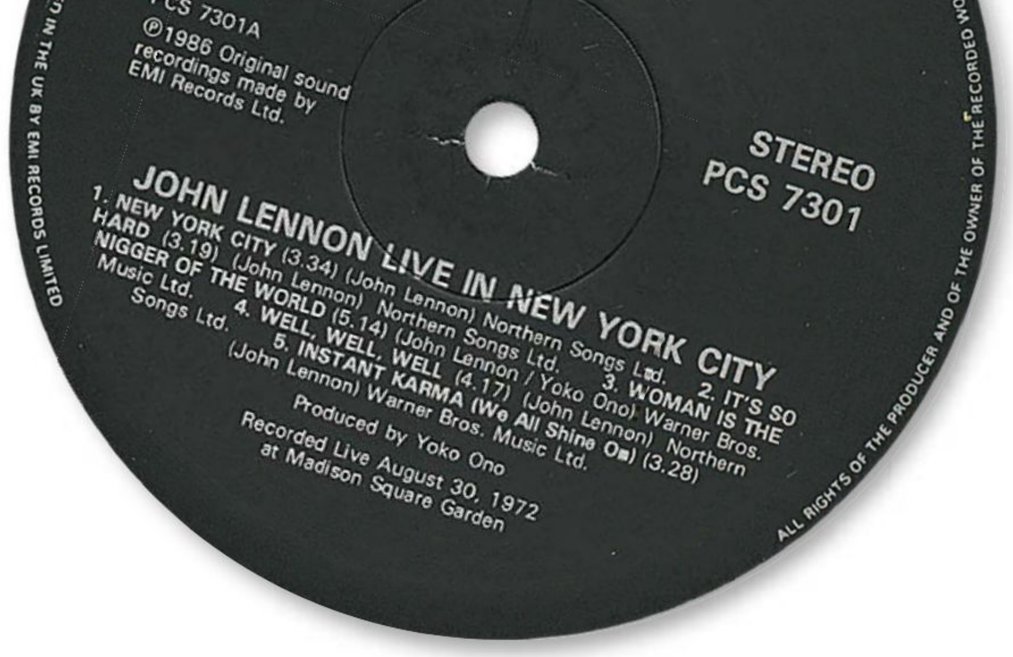
PARLOPHONE
JOHN LENNON
SIDE 1
PCS 7301A
℗1986 Original sound recordings made by EMI Records Ltd.
STEREO
PCS 7301
JOHN LENNON LIVE IN NEW YORK CITY
1. NEW YORK CITY (3.34) (John Lennon) Northern Songs Ltd.
2. IT'S SO HARD (3.19) (John Lennon) Northern Songs Ltd.
3. WOMAN IS THE NIGGER OF THE WORLD (5.14) (John Lennon / Yoko Ono) Warner Bros. Music Ltd.
4. WELL, WELL, WELL (4.17) (John Lennon) Northern Songs Ltd.
5. INSTANT KARMA (We All Shine On) (3.28) (John Lennon) Warner Bros. Music Ltd.
Produced by Yoko Ono
Recorded Live August 30, 1972 at Madison Square Garden
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Harlem Apollo to commemorate the victims of the Attica State prison riots. Never mind 10,000 hours: Lennon's total live work for the final 15 years of his life – even if you include a couple of TV slots – falls considerably short of 10 hours.

Live In New York City records Lennon's next gig, a segment of a charity concert which took place at Madison Square Garden, New York, on August 30, 1972, with one matinee and one evening performance. It would be the last time John and Yoko played a concert together. Lennon would briefly return to Madison Square Garden two years later to guest with Elton John on a handful of numbers, but this turned out to be his final headlining gig.

Is it any good? When the album was posthumously first released in 1986, it wasn't well received. It was slated in the *NME*, the review accompanied by an onstage picture of John talking to Yoko. "Release that piece of shit live recording?" read the picture caption. "Over my dead body!"

Lennon's own relentless nervousness throughout the concert doesn't inspire much confidence. "Are we too loud for you?" he says after the first song. "Welcome to the rehearsal." Every piece of between-song banter is loaded with self-deprecation and panic. "Hope you recognised that," he says after one song; "We'll get it right next time," he says after another; "I nearly got all the words right there."

It's puzzling, because it's a pretty decent gig. Most of the songs sound fine, and the band – with some reservations – are great. Plus, of course, the entire event takes on a terrible poignancy when you realise that it would be Lennon's last real show.

Perhaps Lennon's nerves are understandable given the backstory. In early 1972, Lennon and Ono were moved by a series of TV reports on the Willowbrook State School, an institution for mentally handicapped children on Staten Island that had been the subject of criticism for several years. The reporter Geraldo Rivera, on New York's WABC-TV, uncovered deplorable conditions, overcrowding, poor sanitation and even evidence of sexual and physical abuse of the children by members of the school staff. When Lennon discovered that Rivera was putting together a fundraiser for the children in the institution – called One To One, as part of a campaign to get one-on-one attention for the children – he and Yoko volunteered their services. With Lennon on-side, a concert was booked at the 20,000-seater Madison Square Garden, also featuring sets from Stevie Wonder, Roberta Flack and Sha Na Na.

The gig came at a time when Lennon was embroiled in a protracted legal campaign to prevent himself from being deported as an "undesirable resident". With his phone tapped, and his apartment under FBI surveillance, his paranoia was obviously overtaking his music. Lennon was being advised by his lawyer, Leon Wildes, to play down some of his more controversial political alliances, as US immigration needed persuading that John and Yoko did not present a threat to national security. Wildes had suggested that Lennon stop playing benefits for prisoners and political militants and instead engage in more neutral, mainstream charity work – in the mould of George Harrison's Concert For Bangla Desh. The One To One project seemed ideal for this.

Lennon was still nervous about headlining. He even contacted Paul and Linda McCartney, asking them to join him for the gig. When they politely declined, Lennon got cold feet and tried to pull out, before Rivaldo visited him and talked him around. A panicked Lennon assembled Elephant's Memory, the New York blues band with whom he had just recorded *Some Time In New York City*, and started rehearsing several weeks in advance. They first assembled at a New York rehearsal room and even booked out the Fillmore East during downtime. Terrified of losing his voice for the shows, Lennon whispered his vocals in rehearsals, often singing an octave below the correct pitch.

In the event, his voice is in pretty good shape throughout. After an ecstatic introduction from

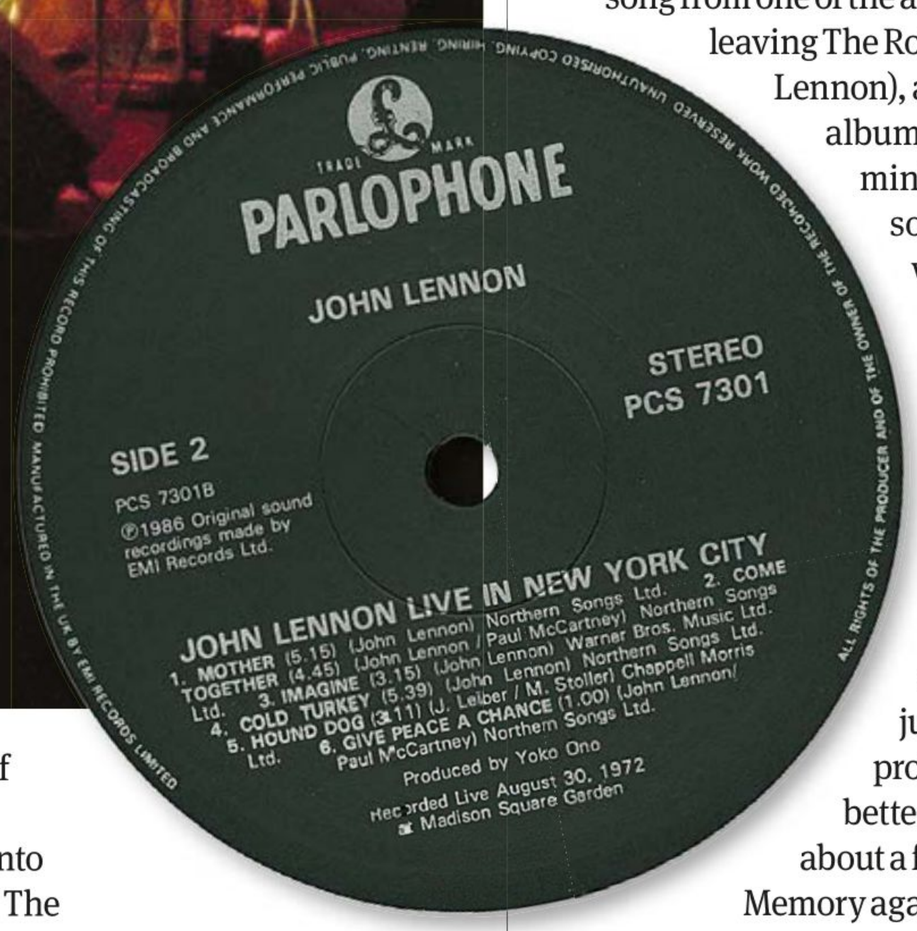
THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

"Erratic, frequently shoddy and often jarring, this, at least, was the real John Lennon, with fire in his belly and rage in his heart. From here on it was downhill. Remember him this way."
Colin Irwin, Melody Maker, March 1, 1986

"I'll still love John Lennon as an able songwriter. But some things I'd simply prefer to forget. This has been one of them."
John McCready, NME, March 1, 1986

JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS

Elephant's Memory add the muscle for Lennon's One To One benefit gig – Madison Square Garden, August 30, 1972



Rivera, a chant of "Power To The People" segues into "New York City". The opening lyric: "*Standing on the corner/Just me and Yoko Ono/We was waiting for Jerry to land*" substitutes Jerry (Rubin) for Geraldo, and it's fiercer and harder than the album version, with saxophonist Stan Bronstein's honking punctuations and Adam Ippolito's rock'n'roll piano reminiscent of the Clarence Clemons/Roy Bittan interplay in Springsteen's E-Street Band.

Given that the Plastic Ono Band had usually been a ragbag of itinerant guest musicians (Harrison, Starr, Clapton, Voormann, Keith Moon, Billy Preston etc), Elephant's Memory are probably the one "proper band" that Lennon would front. Occasionally, their easy-going musicianship is a problem. They display a tendency towards the casual, it'll-be-alright-on-the-night sloppiness that only the most accomplished musicians can pull off. And they slip far too easily into a kind of glib pub-blues, even when it's deeply inappropriate.

Take the harrowing version of "Mother". In one of the concert's highlights, Lennon starts choking up a few bars into the song. Barely able to hit the higher notes, he howls out the "*Mamma don't go/ Daddy come home*" lines in full Janovian Primal Scream mode. It requires a suitably bald, spartan, funereal accompaniment, yet Elephant's Memory can't resist injecting a touch of blues into the song – saxophone *obbligatos*, guitar noodling – before ending the song on a big, rock'n'roll flourish. The bassist rattling the root note, the drummer bashes out a *ker-boom-cha!* punchline: it's as if someone has ended a tearful eulogy at a funeral with a clown's hooter. The band are similarly indelicate with "Imagine".

Elephant's Memory are much better on uptempo, bluesy, knockabout rock'n'roll songs. "New York City" burns brightly; in a song that started out as an obvious Chuck Berry tribute, Lennon's vestigial Scouse accent is stronger than ever. The bar-room blues of "It's So Hard" – all honking sax and chugging guitars – fits them like a glove, as does "Woman Is The Nigger Of The World", while "Instant Karma", which Lennon leads from a Wurlitzer electric piano, benefits from Stan Bronstein's sax. They show that they can underplay sensitively on "Well Well Well" ("A song from one of the albums I made since leaving The Rolling Stones", quips Lennon), accentuating the album version's proto-metal minimalism, although the song really takes off when Lennon ditches the Presley parodies and launches into the Primal Scream coda.

The one concession to Beatles fans is his countercultural celebration, "Come Together". "We're going back to the past just once," he says. "You probably remember this better than I do... something about a flat-top." Elephant's Memory again resist the temptation to overplay and maintain the deliciously reserved groove of the original. "I sang: *'She got hairy arseholes'* instead of what it should have been," claimed Lennon in a later interview, "and it was never noticed." Scrutiny of the take from the evening concert included on *Anthology* suggests that's where the *"hairy arseholes"* appeared, but it's actually a great vocal performance, one that pushes him right to the top of his register.

Lennon's relentless nervousness doesn't inspire much confidence... each piece of between-song banter is loaded with panic

The enjoyably dumb "Hound Dog" gets a perfunctory reading – with added interest provided by Yoko's hound dog yelps and screams, as does the hard-rocking "Cold Turkey". The encore is a funky reading of "Give Peace A Chance", where the band are accompanied by a crowd banging the tambourines that had been handed out to the audience before the show. "It confirmed what we had always believed," said Yoko, "that the audience are really the Plastic Ono Band."

Yoko curated the tapes of the Madison Square Garden show, authorising and helping to edit the 1986 release. Elephant's Memory were critical of her decision to release the matinee performance rather than the evening gig, which they felt was a stronger show. Oddly, Yoko seemed to have no objection to the engineers removing most of her backing vocals from the mixing board tapes for this album, and seemed happy for the album to omit four of her lead vocals. "Sisters O Sisters" and "Born In A Prison" were reinstated on the accompanying video (which had a longer running time), but "Move On Fast" and "Open Your Box" remained on the cutting-room floor. A pity because, on the extant recordings of the Plastic Ono Band performances, Yoko is often the loose cannon who makes each show interesting, turning them from supergroup jams into countercultural 'happenings'. We do, though, get a brief, refreshing reminder of her anarchy on the video. As the band are laying down the beat for "Give Peace A Chance", she grabs the microphone and starts to read a quote "from a politician that we all know".

"The streets of our country are in turmoil," quotes Yoko. "The universities are filled with students rebelling and rioting. Communists seek to destroy our country. Russia is threatening us with her might, and the republic is in danger. Yes, danger. From within and without. We need law and order. Without law and order, our nation shall not survive." She then announces that the quote comes, not from a contemporary conservative, but from a 1932 speech by Adolf Hitler. Many academics are rather sceptical that Hitler ever actually said this, believing that the speech was fabricated by '60s hippies to discredit law-and-order reactionaries. But let's not let facts get in the way too much – Yoko's intervention is a wonderfully random, Situationist touch.

The One To One shows were immensely high profile, heavily supported by the maverick New York Mayor John Lindsay, who consistently resisted the plans to deport Lennon. The crowd also included Senator George McGovern, the Democratic Party's presidential candidate at the upcoming election, and a strong opponent of the Vietnam War. Many figures in the anti-war movement had come up with a plan to assemble a travelling roadshow, headlined by Lennon, which would follow the Democratic Party primaries across the country, and also perform in San Diego during the Republican convention. It would, they claimed, mobilise young voters (the voting age had just been reduced from 21 to 18) and force the parties to end the Vietnam War.

It remains a fascinating "what-if". Had Lennon's anti-war tour taken place, one wonders if the result of the 1972 election might have been any different (probably not), whether Lennon's live career would have been relaunched (possibly), and whether it would have got him deported (almost certainly). As it happens, Lennon realised that such a high-profile political tour would be catastrophic for his fight for citizenship. But one suspects that it might also have had something to do with his enormous self-doubt as a live performer.

LENNON: ARCHIVE 1972

NME
SEPTEMBER 30, 1972

NME
OCTOBER 7, 1972

'When people say I'm self-indulgent, it's only because I'm not doing what they want me to do...'

Late at night in NYC, ROY CARR is granted an audience with John and Yoko, days after their triumphant Madison Square Garden gig and return to live rock'n'roll. Amidst the usual money worries, there's more energy than ever. Plus: how Yoko saved John from being a 'Rock Square'

REX FEATURES

Toppermost of the shoppermost: John and Yoko outside an A&P store, NYC, 1972

New York, New York: John and Yoko get an assist from a cop as they battle through the crowd after leaving the Immigration Office on Broadway, May 12, 1972

UNDERWOOD ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

NME SEPTEMBER 30/OCTOBER 7, 1972

"THAT MADISON SQUARE Gardens gig," says John Lennon, nostalgia in his eyes, and his hand stretched forward holding a welcoming beer, "was the best music I enjoyed playing since the Cavern or even Hamburg."

It's 1.30am as we slip into the vacant bedroom to talk and escape the congestion of the entire population of Greenwich Village noisily setting up its rock hardware in the living-room next door.

The scene is the Lennons' spiffy Midtown hotel suite, 30 floors up from the hot sweat of New York's 7th Avenue and only mugging distance from Times Square. Down on the street the shrill scream of a speeding police car punctures the conversation.

I have been trying to see him for more then a week and he knows it, apologising as he digs deep into a crumbled packet of cigarettes as he sits on the single bed with Yoko at his side.

"Man," says Lennon, continuing the theme, "I really enjoyed that Madison gig." He peers at me like a contented owl from behind the familiar tinted National Health shades perched atop the bridge of his nose. "I mean, you were there. You could see I was on the trip all right. It was just the same kinda feeling when The Beatles used to really get into it.

"Funnily enough, I tend to remember the times before The Beatles happened most of all. Like in Hamburg we used to do this... at the Cavern we used to do that... in the ballrooms the other. In those days we weren't just doing an entertaining thing, or whatever the hell it was we were supposed to be. That was when we played music. That's what I enjoy and remember best about those days.

"That's the same feeling we got at Madison Square Gardens with Elephant's Memory" – Yoko nods in full agreement – "and you know they're such a good band. Stan Bronstein, their tenor sax player, is a real rare one. Perhaps the best since King Curtis, that's what I say."

Having been at the Lennon concert, I more than go along with him in regarding it as an event never to be forgotten. As the minutes ticked into the first hour of a new day, I had seen Lennon push a thick wad of gum hard

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

John and Yoko performed "Woman Is The Nigger Of The World" on *The Dick Cavett Show* on May 11, 1972. Cavett insisted the recording be shown, despite ABC's attempts to have it cut. As a compromise, Cavett apologised to the audience in advance for the song's controversy

into his cheek and grind out a boogie rhythm on his Les Paul Gibson as he screamed: "*New York City... Que Pasa, New York? Que Pasa, New York*", before a demonstrative crowd of well over 20,000 Manhattans plus a few mad dogs and visiting Englishmen. It was magnetic.

The response that night from the animated multitude stompin' madly on their 15-dollar seats had been deafening, and the stream of gut-level licks coming from the stage substantiated all that we felt. Here, for the first time since the fragmentation of The Beatles, John Lennon finally got back to where he once belonged... rockin' and rollin'... pushing his powerful lungs to their limits and then beyond, accompanied by one of the raunchiest punk street bands I had ever heard. When he sat at the piano to sing "Imagine" it was to perfection, and the silence had a magic of its own as the slow chugging intro of "Come Together" slid out of the giant bank of speakers.

> **"Touring is gonna be a big problem. It wouldn't be so bad if we *didn't* take home a packet of money..."**

The motivation behind this Lennon emotion-packed official reunion with the public followed a TV exposé by New York's celebrity newscaster Geraldo Rivera, on the squalid conditions suffered by the mentally retarded children of the upstate Willowbrook Institution. In the wake of a violent public outcry, John and Yoko, in collaboration with New York's Mayor John V Lindsay, had proclaimed August 30 a fundraising day and they were personally responsible for raising $350,000 to help alleviate the children's plight.

My mental flashback to the concert passes and Lennon opens a new pack of cigarettes and explains: "There were all sorts of plans to do a world tour, and then the US immigration thing started, so that had to be shelved. Even with the Madison Square Gardens gig, though, I can't begin to tell you the weird things that went on before it. Touring is going to be a big problem. It wouldn't be so bad if we could do a tour and not take home a packet of money which only becomes a tax problem, and God only knows what else. The perfect solution would be to do it so that we only cover costs. But then what you do, when do you do it, and who do you do it for?

"In my position it's harder to do something that doesn't earn a couple of million than it is to go out with the intention of earning it. Believe it or not, people would seem to be happier if you took the bread and ran. And that's only one of the complications. We just wanna play but at the moment it's just a hassle. Paul's trying i t, and it might be working for him. He's got his band together and he's hitting the road and appearing wherever he can.

"The way Yoko and I were doing it was at the Lyceum, in Toronto, and with Frank Zappa at the Fillmore – until we got together with Elephant's Memory. All we're trying to do is just play without it developing into some weird scene. But it's almost impossible, if you do it a lot."

He pauses, looks at Yoko, smiles, and ponders on his last words.

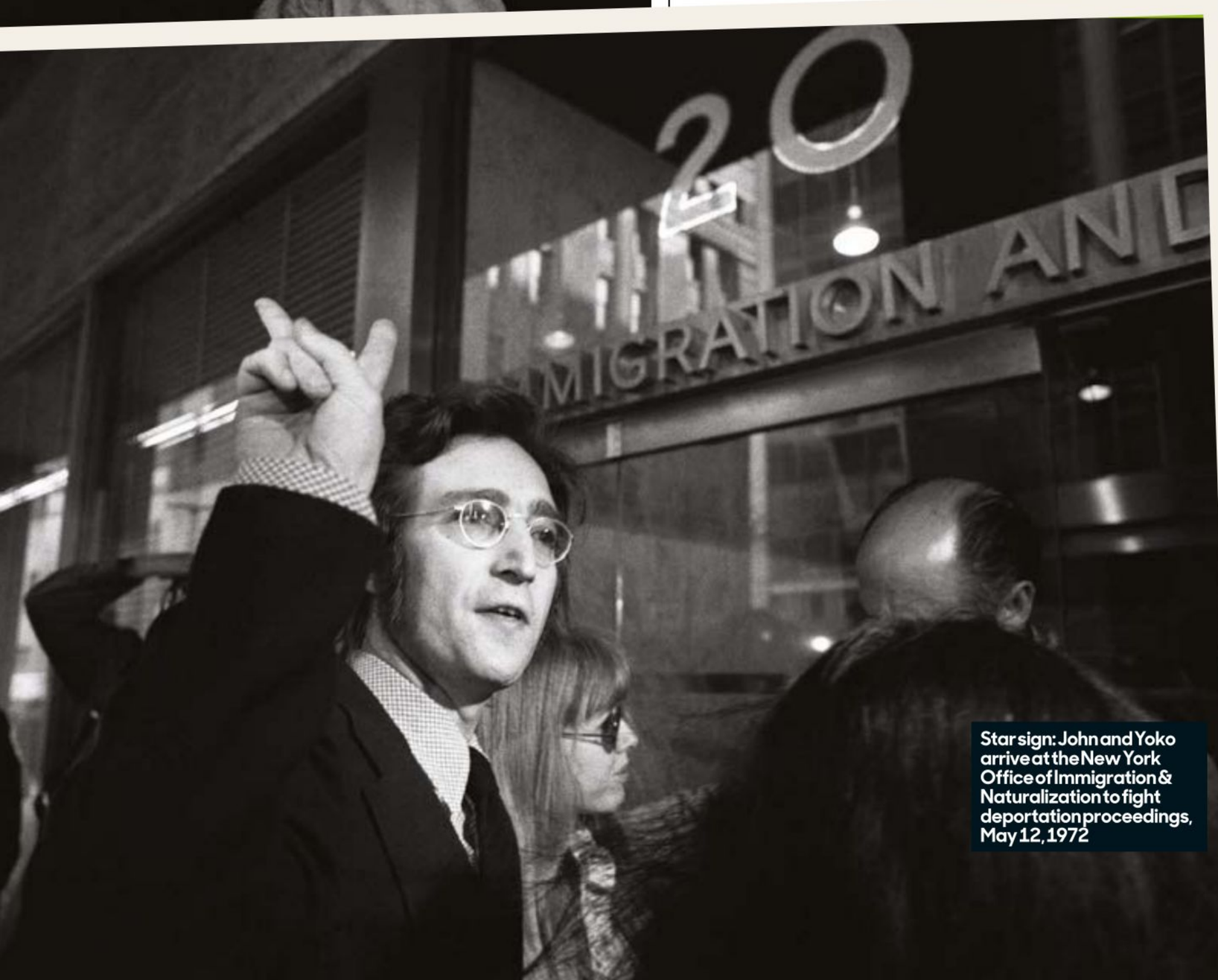
"I don't know," he says again, "if we're prepared to do it a lot." He continues, directing the statement at Yoko. She stays silent.

"It's not because we're bothered about losing the buzz, but you know you get involved with such hassles as who's making T-shirts and who's got these rights; unions, cameras; and before you realise what's happening it soon becomes bigger then both of us. Either that, or it's "forget about the hassle". But if we do then you get a lot of people ripping a lot of other people off. At one time Yoko and I thought about going over to Ireland to do something, but until we've cleared up this immigration thing we can't leave America. We're kind of trapped. It might prove difficult for us to re-enter the country. It depends which way the wind is blowing.

"On the *Some Time In New York City* album the royalties of 'Sunday Bloody Sunday' and 'The Luck Of The Irish' are supposed to go to the Civil Rights Movement in both Ireland and New York. Angela [*Davis, civil rights activist*]'s money is towards whatever she's struggling for, and some more is for the Attica dependents. Whether we can get it out of the 'system' or not is another thing, but we're gonna try. In the end it gets down to what somebody in our position can do to help others."

He admits he can fully understand the reasons why others refuse.

"You see, I was in there. When you're a child you're surrounded by relatives, and most of us seem to get ourselves in the position where we create a whole new set of relatives... like friends and advisers, however well-meaning. Suddenly you get in a position where you get so much money – and if you're like us you're aware there's a lot of people come out with more. So you go through the whole bit – 'Why did they get more CONTINUES OVER »



Star sign: John and Yoko arrive at the New York Office of Immigration & Naturalization to fight deportation proceedings, May 12, 1972

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

than us? Didn't we do the work? Didn't we write the songs and record them?

"It's the people – whoever they may be – who stay around the fringe of the artist who create a situation where the artist is always in fear of being hit by the taxman. Either that, or you spend so much because you're living a life in which you don't even think about it.

"So there you are, living in a limbo where you're constantly worried that you might end up owing – or that someone will come along and take away whatever you have left. The people who get into that position are insecure anyway, like me. They get you up there. You collect it, 'cos you're insecure enough to want to do it. You do it. Then you become surrounded, and scared of it being taken away from you.

"So what do you do? You find that you're going round in circles for the rest of your life."

"THE BEATLES HAD a standard to live up to," admits John Lennon, lighting up yet another four-inch link in an endless chain of battered cigarettes. "And for that reason, when The Beatles went into the studio, they had to stay in for at least six months. Today, I just couldn't stand to be locked up in a studio for that length of time." Lennon's reason is as simple as it is short: "I don't want a standard to live up to."

"You know," he tells me that muggy night in New York, "when The Beatles cartoons come on the TV every Sunday, I still get a kick outta watching them... it's just like leaving home – after that you automatically get on with your parents."

I bring us back to the present and ask: how much has Yoko influenced John, and how much has John influenced Yoko? Lennon displays obvious pleasure at the subject. "She," he begins with an affectionate smile at Yoko, "changed my life completely. Not just physically... the only way I can describe it is that Yoko was like an acid trip or the first time you got drunk. It was that big a change, and that's just about it. I can't really describe it to this day."

I put it to them that an example would be appreciated and they both choose their new album, *Some Time In New York City* as an illustration. Again, it's John who leads off: "If you really wanna know, Yoko writes all her own chords and music completely. If I can get in a riff or something, then I'm lucky. A lot of people don't know this but Yoko was classically trained from the age of four, and that as you know, has its rewards and its disadvantages, in the same way of any training. It's always hard to hit upon specific details, but for instance, the idea for a song like "Imagine" came out of Yoko's influence regardless of what the format of that song was. Half the way I'm thinking, musically, philosophically and every other way is her influence both as a woman and an artist. Her influence is so overwhelming that it was big enough not only for me to change my life with The Beatles, but also my private life, which has nothing to do with how sexually attractive we are to each other."

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

The disputed Republic of Abkhazia proclaimed independence from the former Soviet Georgia in 1989. To celebrate their rejection of communism, the Republic issued two postage stamps adorned not with the faces of Lenin and Karl Marx, but with John Lennon and Groucho Marx...

For Lennon it's time for another cigarette, for Yoko a chance to offer her observations.

"Naturally, my life also changed. Mainly what we give each other is energy, because we're both energetic people and when we're in the company of other people who we might feel are less energetic, then we have to give more. For instance, if we're onstage and John is reading a song really good, and I have to come after him, then that means that I've got to do my very best. So then I do a screaming piece or something, and then John does a screaming piece after that, and then he has to stop me.

"That's precisely what was happening during our concert at Madison Square Garden. Many of our close friends noticed we were really sparking off each other."

John interjects with his own interpretation: "I mean, I got up from the piano in one number, and, Jesus, it was like following an act or something. Phew, it was just the same as competing in the Olympics when you've really got to box your best. It was really weird."

Suddenly Lennon stops talking, leans over, and with a teasing growl, roars into Yoko's right ear: "Go on, luv, tell him how I influenced yer."

She laughs nervously, tries to ignore his request. "The thing is..." But she can't complete the sentence as she breaks up in a fit of laughter.

"All right," she concedes.

"That was the question, remember," says John in an effort to redirect her train of thought.

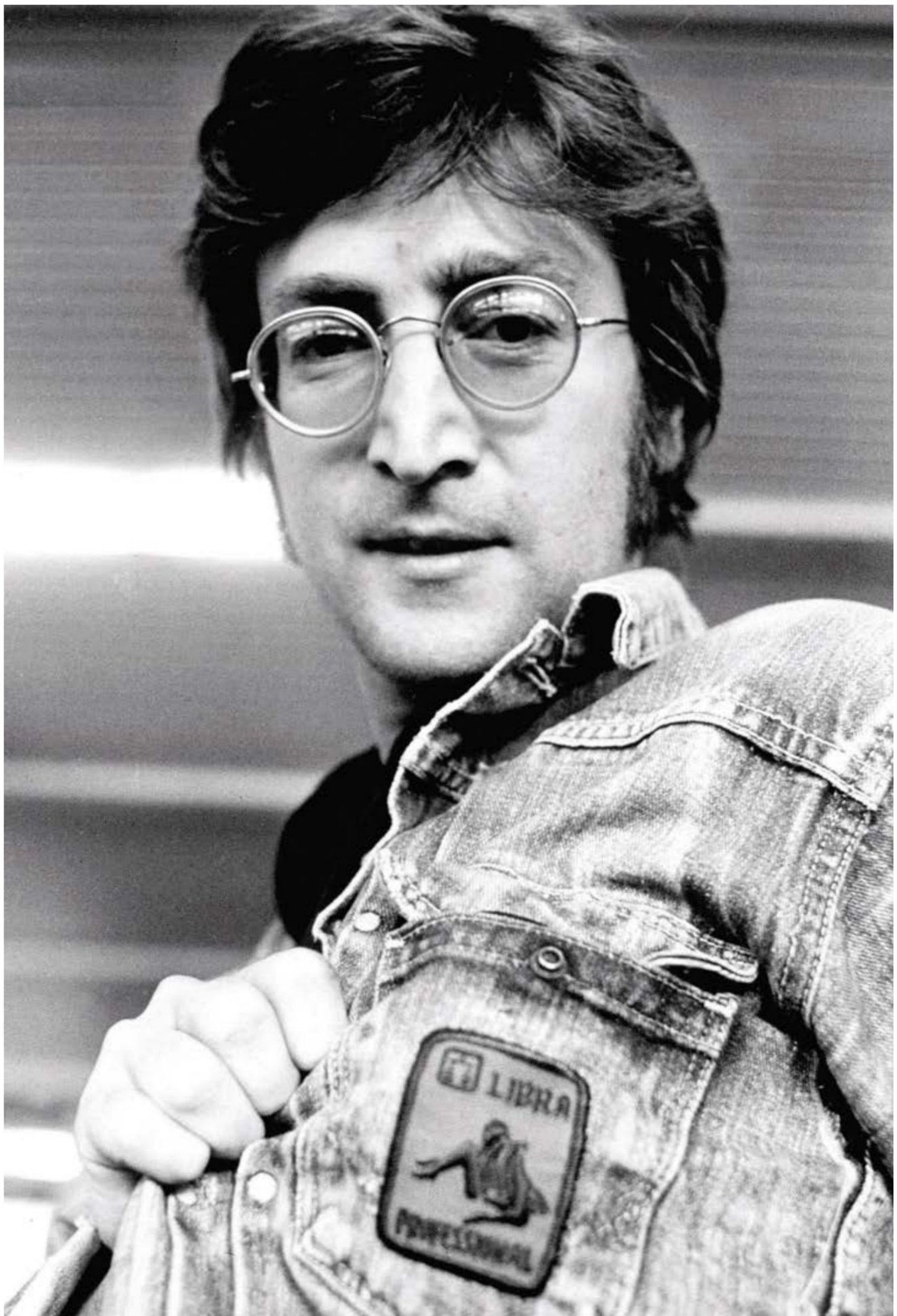
"OK, then I'll answer it. It's obvious, I think, that these days my songs are all rock..."

"And what were they before?" intrudes Lennon, temporarily taking over the role of interviewer.

"Well I was mainly doing my voice experiments. You know, screaming and all that, but then I got very interested in the rock beat because it is like the heartbeat. It's very basic and a very healthy thing. Most music, other than rock, went away from that healthy direction and into perversion. That's the way I feel about it."

John: "Just virtuosity."

Yoko: "Actually, I think the most obvious change has been on my side, which is that my musical style changed. Whereas John is virtually sticking to what he's always done. But I adopted rock."



SIPA PRESS/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

John and Yoko performing with Chuck Berry (not pictured) on *The Mike Douglas Show*, February 14, 1972

Yoko's last four words prompt Lennon to enthuse: "Yeah... yeah" prior to proudly pointing out to his wife: "But I did that Cambridge thing with you. Now wasn't that an adaptation?"

Yoko, unperturbed: "Rock is a whole new field for me and I get inspired so much that I find that now a lot of songs are coming out of me. Also, I think I was getting to a point where I didn't have too much competition. John was always with boys who were working together and therefore in direct competition. That was his situation. I was far more isolated."

She pauses and Lennon takes over the conversation: "It just came to me – for the two of us it was a question of mutual adjustment, with all the joys and pleasures of marriage on an artistic and musical level. However, it's not just the music, or our lifestyle, or where we're living. The whole change is happening in the space between us.

"Yoko coined a phrase. 'Rock Square'... and I was definitely in that box. I would never have admitted it while it was happening, but nevertheless, it was going on.

"What happens is that you suddenly become exactly what you didn't like about other forms of music, be it jazz or classical or whatever, and then you have to admit that it should really be like this or that. Now, when someone comes along and says 'no', it can be whatever you want it to be. That's a very big change to go through. But after you experience it, then you loosen. You feel free to do whatever."

The facts behind Lennon's candour reveal that at the dizziest heights of Beatlemania he lost contact with reality.

> **"A working guy will get lost for a weekend, get pissed and forget who he is. We got blotto for two months..."**

"That happened many times, but then a lot of other people go the same way. Just being 'A Star', or whatever it was that happened, made it a little more unreal. So perhaps the periods lasted just a little bit longer.

"Look, a working guy will get lost for a weekend, get pissed, and forget who he is or dream that he's so-and-so in his car. Well, it was just the same with us. But instead of getting blotto for a weekend, we got blotto for two months, trying to forget whatever it is that everybody tries to forget all the time. Instead of worrying about who is gonna pay the milkman, we worried who was gonna pay whatever it was we'd gone out and spent.

"I think that around the time of *Help!* I began to wonder what the hell was happening, because things were definitely starting to get very weird by then. But then, I can only judge it by *A Hard Day's Night*. At that time, we still had one foot in the backyard."

With Marc Bolan today attempting to Xerox the kind of hysteria amongst Britannia's children that John, Paul, George and Ringo patented a generation earlier, I further enquire if Lennon bleeds in sympathy for today's teenyboppers.

"I dunno if I feel sorry for these people or not. But I do think about it. The first thing that strikes me is the things these stars say in the musical papers changes so often. Yer know what I mean: like when they keep on saying, 'We're the greatest.' I mean, when I read about Dave Bowie bitchin' with Marc Bolan, who is bitchin' with Fred Astaire... Actually, it's a bit of a laugh when you're not doing it yourself.

"I imagine it's all down to the fact of the bigger you become, the more insecure you feel. I'd like to think that people could learn from the mistakes others have made. But they don't. It's like you can't tell anybody nothing, ever. I can't learn myself from other people's mistakes. There's nobody I can think of, where he did that, and that's where he goofed. You can sing about it, because that's your own experience, but you can't expect anyone to think along the lines, 'Oh, so they did that and that happened, so we won't do that.' You can't do it. It never works."

"Self-indulgent" is a put-down constantly aimed at John Lennon, and his reply to such criticism is explicit.

"When people say I'm self-indulgent, it's only because I'm not doing what they want me to do. Simply because they're still hung up on my past. If you've noticed, when they say such things, they don't usually refer to the music. Actually, I got it down the other day. People talk about not what you do, but how you do it, which is like discussing how you dress or if your hair is long or short. They can say what they want, but the artist knows best, anyway, and when you work at such an energy level, like Yoko and me, then you're doomed to be heavily criticised."

The cigarettes have run out, so has the tape, and we've talked ourselves dry. I have a plane to catch at noon and the Lennons have a live TV show to rehearse. *New York City... Que Pasa, New York, Que Pasa, John and Yoko?*

EVERETT COLLECTION INC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

MIND GAMES

Big Statements behind him, a beleaguered and bewildered Dr Winston O'Boogie delves further than ever into his psyche. BY BUD SCOPPA

RELEASE DATE
16 NOVEMBER 1973

ON *PLASTIC ONO BAND*, *Imagine* and *Some Time In New York City*, John Lennon's agenda had been emphatically clear. He had plumbed the depths of his own psyche, envisaged a secular heaven on Earth and thrown himself into the throbbing pulse of his adopted New York City alongside a posse of American revolutionaries. By mid-1973, with these items now checked off his to-do list, what was the 32-year-old Thinking Man's Beatle to do next?

As if being the most scrutinised ex-Beatle didn't make things weird enough, pressing real-life issues had come to dominate Lennon's existence. Weighing on him at the time was what would become a protracted legal battle with the US Immigration Department, attempting to initiate deportation proceedings against him based on his 1968 pot conviction in London. During the ordeal, Leon Wildes, Lennon's immigration attorney, managed to prove that the government's efforts to get rid of him had come down directly from the Nixon administration, whose minions were secretly watching his every move. Concurrently, Allen Klein was suing Lennon, Harrison and Starr after they intentionally allowed their management contract with him to expire. And John and Yoko's extended honeymoon was coming to an end, the frays of their relationship leading to what would turn into an 18-month separation. Little wonder he added "Los Paranoias" to his standard "Dr Winston O'Boogie" credit in the *Mind Games* package.

Holed up in the Dakota (aka the "Nutopian Embassy", a reference to the couple's latest ideological initiative, inspired by their anti-deportation struggle) just a few months before he either split of his own accord or was kicked out, Lennon found himself distracted by his unresolved problems. While he searched for direction, his wife was on a roll, hard at work on her own third solo LP, *Feeling The Space*, with a bunch of top-flight American session musicians. The crew was anchored by drummer Jim Keltner, a Tulsa-born, LA-based stalwart who'd played on *Imagine*, George Harrison's

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

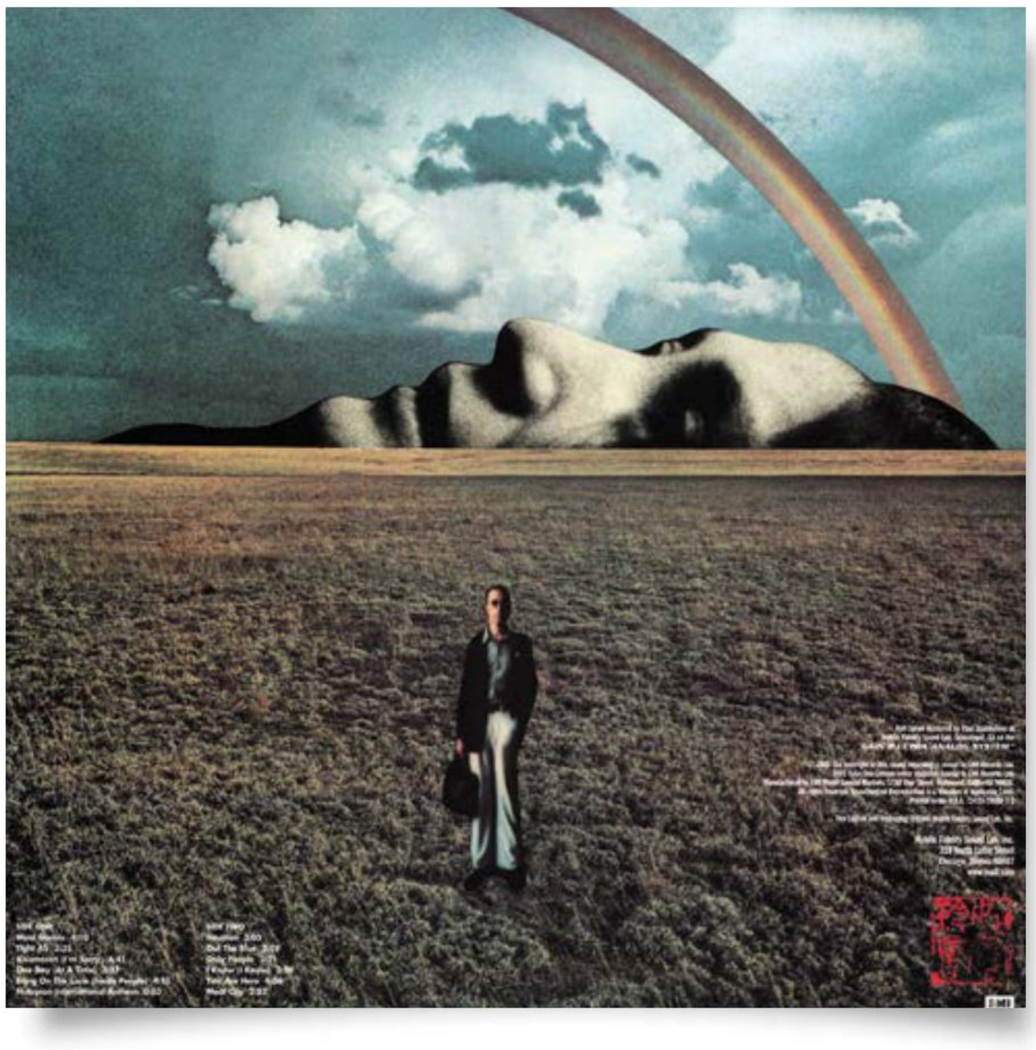
1 | Mind Games ★★★★★
2 | Tight A$ ★★★★
3 | Aisumasen (I'm Sorry) ★★★★
4 | One Day (At A Time) ★★★
5 | Bring On The Lucie (Freda Peeple) ★★★★
6 | Nutopian International Anthem ★
7 | Intuition ★★★
8 | Out The Blue ★★★★★
9 | Only People ★★★★
10 | I Know (I Know) ★★★★
11 | You Are Here ★★★★
12 | Meat City ★★

2002 REISSUE BONUS TRACKS

13 | Aisumasen (I'm Sorry) (Home version) ★★
14 | Bring On The Lucie (Freda Peeple) (Home version) ★★★
15 | Meat City (Home version) ★★★

- **Released:** November 16, 1973
- **Produced by:** John Lennon
- **Recorded at:** The Record Plant, New York, (July–August 1973)
- **Personnel:** John Lennon (aka Dr Winston O'Boogie); Ken Ascher (keyboards); David Spinozza (guitar); Gordon Edwards (bass); Jim Keltner (drums); Michael Brecker (saxophone); 'Sneaky' Pete Kleinow (pedal steel); Rick Marotta (additional drums on "Meat City"); Something Different (backing chorus)
- **Highest chart position:** UK 13; US 9

MIND GAMES
JOHN LENNON



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JOHN LENNON
MIND GAMES
SN-16068
(SN-1-16068)
1
1. MIND GAMES • 4:10
(John Lennon) BMI
2. TIGHT AS • 3:35
(John Lennon) BMI
3. AISUMASEN (I'm Sorry) • 4:41
(John Lennon) BMI
4. ONE DAY (At A Time) • 3:27
(John Lennon) BMI
5. BRING ON THE LUCIE (Freeda Peeple) • 4:11
(John Lennon) BMI
6. NUTOPIAN INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM • :03
(John Lennon) BMI
Produced by John Lennon
℗1973 EMI
Records Limited

April 1, 1973: John and Yoko announce the foundation of the mythical new republic of Nutopia to the press. Its national emblem? White flags...

Concert For Bangla Desh (1971) and *Living In The Material World* (1973), and who was also working on Ringo Starr's *Ringo*. Alongside Keltner were keyboardist Ken Ascher, sax player Michael Brecker, bassist Gordon Edwards, Flying Burrito Brothers pedal steel player 'Sneaky' Pete Kleinow, guitarist David Spinozza (who'd played on Macca's *Ram* and *Red Rose Speedway*) and drummer Rick Marotta. May Pang, the couple's PA and John's soon-to-be lover, initially wrangled the players.

Was Lennon's decision to use the same crew for his next record a case of trying to restore the artistic pecking order with Yoko, or simply a matter of convenience? Either way, booking sessions at the Record Plant East, soon after the completion of *Feeling The Space* in the same studio, and with an ace band already on hand, was a godsend for a guy who wasn't particularly adept at organisation.

According to some reports, Lennon banged out the bulk of the material after booking the time, but Keltner claimed he came in fully prepared: "His songs were all complete. He was the ultimate songwriter in the same way that Bob Dylan is. Neil Young. Guys who write songs where the song plays itself, basically."

Yoko had produced *Feeling The Space* herself, and so, for the very first time, would Lennon – a move that would entail weaning himself from his dependence on Phil Spector. Indeed, this would be Lennon's first album project made without any key member of his previous supporting cast, and as such, it vividly presents his studio persona when left to his own devices. Spector's influence is plentifully evident, however, in the sonics, from the widescreen grandeur of the title song to the echo-drenched uptempo cuts – "Tight A$", "Bring On The Lucie (Freda Peeple)", "Only People" and "Meat City" – along with the heavy use of a female chorale, here credited to a group called Something Different (most likely an assortment of session singers). The backing voices add to the rousing communal atmospheres of "Lucie" and "Only People", but otherwise bring an overlay of blandness to the arrangements – so much so one wishes they could be stripped away.

The foreground instrument through the album is Spinozza's slide guitar, and

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"There's no message in it, and no real surprises. Perhaps it will grow, though: *Imagine* did." *Chris Charlesworth, Melody Maker, November 3, 1973*

"...A terrible album because it in no way reflects Lennon's capabilities... Yet something still lingers. Wit flickers through, it rocks, it rolls. And it's nice and bitchy, too..." *Tony Tyler, NME, Nov 10, 1973*

GETTY IMAGES/BETTMANN

with it come the inevitable reminders of Harrison. But whereas George's signature slide playing arches upward, intimating oneness with the cosmos, Spinozza's slide work in the context of *Mind Games* suggests the vast distance between John's state of mind and the serenity George always found within reach. Several songs take on added resonance from the presence of Sneaky Pete, whose metaphysical pedal steel forays, with their dramatic swoops and flutters, run in emotional counterpoint to Spinozza's yearning slide accents.

As for the songs themselves, the title track stands apart from the other 10 like a skyscraper in a village. Originally titled "Make Love Not War", "Mind Games" was begun during the *Let It Be* sessions [*the original demo is on the John Lennon Anthology, see p106*]. It took its final form after Lennon read the 1972 self-help tome of the same name by Robert Masters and Jean Houston – even writing a recommendation for the book – as he jumped on yet another pop-psychology fad.

From there, though, the album becomes as revealing in its imperfections as its accomplishments. Again, Lennon was writing his life in his songs; throughout *Mind Games*, he appears to be struggling with the contrast between what he was accustomed to feeling and the emotions he was dealing with at the time, as uncertainty infiltrated the fortress of his belief system. The purity of his regard for Yoko, and vice versa, had become more complicated and perilous, as "Aisumasen (I'm Sorry)", "One Day (At A Time)", "I Know (I Know)" and "You Are Here" suggest. And he could no longer rely on a clear distinction between his political heroes and villains.

This seeming inability to achieve certitude, and the resulting anxiety, seem to twist the songs and his performances into unexpected shapes. The familiar modes of his previous solo albums – the ardent love ballad and the righteously delivered message song – here sound more like questions than answers.

On *Mind Games*, the rocking tracks catch the ear more readily, but the ballads wind up leaving a lasting impression, revealing their soulful candour over repeated listenings. In the former group, "Tight A$" is clearly patterned on Carl Perkins' rockabilly classics, a Lennon speciality during the early Beatles days, while "Only People" lays streams of Nutopian nonsense over a bouncily infectious groove. On "Bring On The Lucie (Freda Peeple)", the sole overtly political song on the LP, he takes several shots at the US government, describing the feds as "*jerking off each other*" – a gutsy putdown for a man who knew full well he was a designated government target. Unlike his previous protest songs, this one is ultimately personal; when he sings the refrain "*Free the people now*" it's no longer an abstraction – he's one of the "*people*" yearning to be liberated.

YOKO ON... "MIND GAMES"

"I think he was trying to convey the message that we all play mind games, but if we can play mind games, why not make a positive future with it, to play a positive mind game? I think 'Mind Games' is such an incredibly strong song. But, at the time, I think that people didn't quite get the message because this was before its time. Now, people would understand it. I don't think in those days people knew they were playing mind games anyway."

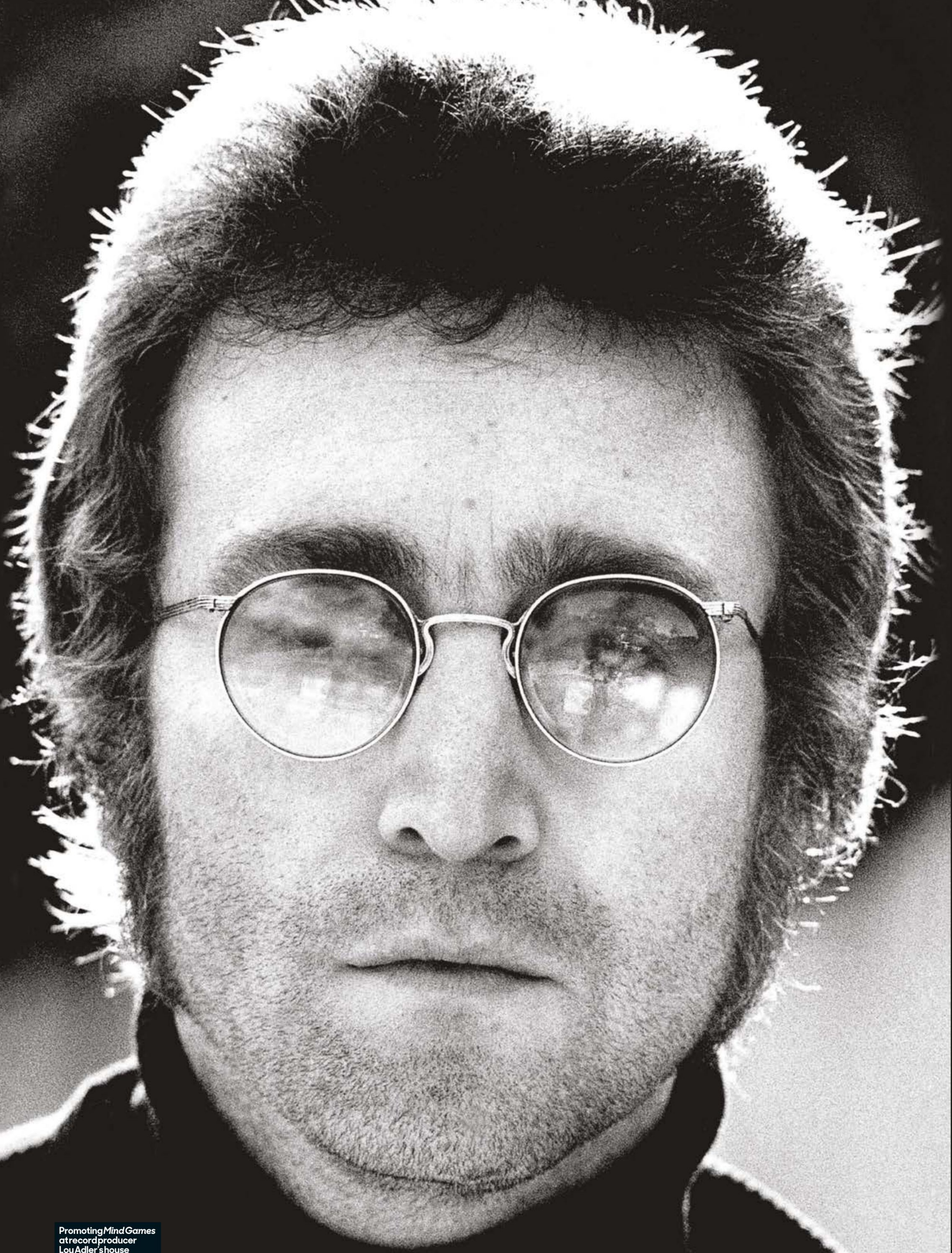
Lennon's uncertainties and anxieties twist the songs and his performances into unexpected shapes...

"Aisumasen (I'm Sorry)", the most naked of the album's Yoko-directed love ballads, is cut from the same cloth as "Jealous Guy" and approaches that earlier classic in terms of understated pathos, while "I Know (I Know)" turns on a lilting guitar figure strikingly similar to the one in *Let It Be*'s "I've Got A Feeling". Both "I Know" and "One Day (At A Time)" come off like internal pep talks, as Lennon attempts to navigate the troubled waters of his relationship – allowing us yet again to eavesdrop on his innermost feelings. The lovely, pedal steel-ornamented "You Are Here" measures the distance between Liverpool and Tokyo in terms of several different intangible scales. On the remaining love song, the melodically elegant, lyrically crisp "Out The Blue", John delivers his most captivating vocal. That leaves the lilting midtempo tune "Intuition", thematically of a piece with the ballads but bearing a musical whimsy most likely derived from Harry Nilsson, Lennon's mate and soon-to-be partner in crimes against propriety.

Considering the closing songs of his first two solo LPs – the purging "My Mummy's Dead" and the rhapsodic "Oh Yoko!" – Lennon's decision to end *Mind Games* with the corrosiveness of "Meat City" can only be seen as perverse, a swift kick in the arse to the good intentions of "One Day (At A Time)". The three home demos on the 2002 reissue deepen the original album's suggestion of creeping ennui: the existential emptiness of "Aisumasen"; the cassette tape wobble on "Bring On The Lucie (Freda Peeple)"; the dark night of the soul with a backbeat of "Meat City". On the latter demo, John's distinctive rhythm guitar licks, isolated from a rhythm section, come off as even more poignantly unguarded than the vocal. "Oh, it is on," he quips at the very end, in a touching moment of self-consciousness. If the recorded version of "Meat City" seems like a denial of the songs it follows, the playful demo, slapped onto the reissue, turns out to be the perfect way to end matters.

Reviewing the subsequent *Shaved Fish* best-of, *The Village Voice*'s Robert Christgau labelled Lennon as "the weirdest major rock and roller of the early '70s" – quite a distinction, but with much evidence to support it. That evidence would include the jaw-dropping self-designed cover of *Mind Games*. Done in the style of a Japanese collage, it shows a Lilliputian Lennon, hat in hand, his hair clipped into a prisoner's buzz cut, with Yoko's profile jutting above the horizon, and two moons poking through the clouds above her monumental proboscis. Whether intended to be facetious or not, the illustration conveys a sense of hopelessness, victimisation. In the wake of the united front the couple had presented during every appearance through the previous half decade, this highly symbolic representation of conflict was downright shocking.

When the album is viewed through a psychological prism, songs that previously seemed half-hearted become charged with apparent meaning and ripe for a deeper probing. *Mind Games* is one of those deeply personal statements, like Marvin Gaye's *Here, My Dear*, Sly Stone's *There's A Riot Goin' On* and Eminem's recent *Relapse*, that carves out its own cosmology, as a beleaguered high-profile artist charts a range of emotions that he doesn't fully understand. If *Some Time In New York City* took the form of a radical tabloid like the *East Village Other*, *Mind Games* comes off as a series of entries in a diary, as Lennon documents the unravelling of his old certainties.



Promoting *Mind Games* at record producer Lou Adler's house in Beverly Hills, November 14, 1973

Melody Maker

FLOYD, SOFTS TO AID WYATT

OSMONDS: sour grapes or old age?

MELODY MAKER
NOVEMBER 3, 1973

'I very rarely write a song with a deep message...'

As Lennon puts the finishing touches to *Mind Games* ("Like *Imagine* with balls!") and begins work on *Rock'n'Roll*, CHRIS CHARLESWORTH finds a man transformed, out on the town in LA. Politics are off the agenda, replaced by a deep love of America and an obsessive interest in bootlegs of himself. Lennon even contemplates the prospects of a Beatles reconciliation. But where's Yoko? "We occasionally take a bath together."

MICHAEL BRENNAN/GETTY IMAGES

WHERE DOHENY CUTS

Sunset at the edge of the Beverly Hills estate, there's a tobacconist shop that carries all makes and brands. It's called Sunset Smokes and it actually sells English cigarettes. When my duty-free allocation burned up, I went there to restock, deciding ultimately on a carton of Rothmans to satisfy my nicotine habit.

"You English?" inquired the shop assistant, who was probably in her late forties. I replied in the affirmative.

"We got Piccadilly now," she informed me. "I'll tell you something," she continued. "When The Beatles were The Beatles and they were staying in Los Angeles, they were in here every day asking for Piccadilly. We couldn't get them then, but we've got them now. If you see one of them, tell them."

Three days later I saw one. He smoked only Gauloises. "I've been smoking these for years," said Lennon, in the bustle of the Rainbow Club, situated on the Strip, not a stone's throw away from Sunset Smokes.

John was sat in the quietest corner of the noisiest club, curled up in a seat among a constant stream of well-wishers and others seeking an audience. In the company was Lou Adler, self-made millionaire, part-owner of the Roxy Club next door, mentor to Carole King and owner of the Bel Air mansion where Lennon is staying on this rare excursion out of New York and rare separation from Yoko.

About a week later, after a series of phone calls and messages, I spent an afternoon at the same Bel Air mansion in the company of Lennon. I took along three recent copies of *Melody Maker*, a token gift he eagerly accepted.

John Lennon seems smaller and thinner than he's ever been. His hair is cropped short and he wears tiny round glasses similar to the type that are provided with sun-ray lamps to protect the eyes from the blinding glare. He sips beer on the terrace and talks willingly about any subject I bring up. He's very friendly and very open.

The reason for his visit to Los Angeles is to put the finishing touches to his next album, *Mind Games*, which is due out in November. But as often as not he's out on the town. Nightly it seems, he's seen socialising at the Rainbow, catching an act at the Roxy and even spending a weekend in Vegas where he stopped off to see Fats Domino.

But, he explains, the problems of being John Lennon are always there. Whenever he's spotted, a crowd gather just to gawk at this little man who, probably more than anyone else, gave popular music the biggest kick in the ass it's ever had.

Once a Beatle, always a Beatle.

We talk for over an hour – about his new record... his love of the States... his dodgy visa situation... his thoughts on the recent Beatle re-release double albums... his lack of live appearances... his views on the current music scene...and, of course, his relationship with the other ex-Beatles.

"Tell me about the new album," I ask him first.

"Well," says John in his thick Liverpool accent, "it's finished. I'm out here in LA to sit on Capitol, to do the artwork and see things like radio promotion. The album's called *Mind Games* and it's, well... just an album.

"It's rock at different speeds. It's not a political album, or an introspective album. Someone told me it was like *Imagine* with balls, which I liked a lot. I've used New York musicians, apart from Jim Keltner on drums. There's no deep message about it. I very rarely write a song with a deep message. Usually, whatever lyrics I write are about what I've been thinking over the past few months. I tend not to want to change an idea once it's in my mind, even if I feel differently about it later. If I stated in a song that water was the philosophy to life, then people would assume that was my philosophy forever – but it's not, it's forever changing."

Yoko is not involved in any way on the new album, although John played some guitar on her last record. The two of them, says John, have decided to keep their careers separate for a while.

"Now that she knows how to produce records and everything about it, I think the best thing I can do is keep out of her hair. We get a little tense in the studio together, but that's not to say we won't ever do another album. If we do an album, or a film, or a bed-in or whatever, that's just the way we feel at that moment.

"We're just playing life by ear, and that includes our careers. We occasionally take a bath together and occasionally separately, just however we feel at the time. Yoko has just started a five-day engagement in a club in New York, and I ain't about to do five days in a New York club. She's over there rehearsing and I'm letting her get on with it her own way."

The current temporary separation between them, says John is the longest there has ever been – but he's quick to deny the inevitable rumours that they have parted.

"We have been apart more than people think, for odd periods over the years, and now I know people are calling from England suggesting we've split up. It's not so. The last time that happened was when we spent one night apart at Ascot and somebody started off rumours. All that scares us about being apart is whether something happens to us. Our minds are tied in together and there's always the telephone, but one of us could have a plane crash or something. We've been together five years or more now, but we've really been together for more then 10 years in most people's terms. Her output and energy is so much greater than mine that I just let her get on with things."

"I think the best thing I can do is keep out of her hair. Yoko and I are just playing life by ear, and that includes our careers"

John considers *Mind Games* to be better than *Imagine*, although he says he's never completely satisfied with his records. "For the last 10 years I've said that if I don't like something I wouldn't put it out, but whenever I played the record back I'm thinking of ways to change it and make it better still. It's good, but you can always do better and that's why I go on making records. I was disappointed at the reaction to the last album. Over here they banned it and made such a fuss about the songs, and it was never played because they said it ["*Woman Is The Nigger Of The World*"] insulted blacks, which it didn't at all. I know a lot of black people, and they know what's going on.

"I know it was political with a capital 'P', but that was what I had in my bag at the time and I wasn't just going to throw them away because they were political. *Imagine* did pretty well, so after that I wanted to just do one that I felt like. I still like 'Woman Is The Nigger Of The World'. I like the sound of it and it gets me off, but it just happened that it didn't please people."

At present, John has no immediate plans to tour or appear live anywhere. He had plans until the much-publicised visa situation reared up, and now he's content to wait until these problems are sorted out before going on the road.

"At the time they were throwing me out, I really felt like going on the road, but having to go to court and go to Washington put me off the idea. I had no time to think about work, which was maybe what

GETTYIMAGES/BETTMANN

A crop-haired Lennon and Yoko are among the spectators at the Watergate hearings in Washington on June 27, 1973

they were trying to do to me – wear me down. I wouldn't mind doing it, but the organisation frightens me. I could probably earn a lot of money, which wouldn't be a bad thing because all my money is tied up in England and they won't let me have it. I get lots of people wanting me to do things for charity, but usually when I show, it turns out the whole thing is a fiasco and I end up running the whole show.

"Not many people know how to put a show on properly: most of them think that if they get a famous name, he'll call everybody he knows and they won't have to worry about anything else. The Bangladesh show started this big charity thing. Now people ring me and they think that if I say 'yes' then Dylan, George and God will appear too. If Yoko appears anywhere, they automatically expect me to appear, so I now say 'screw it' for the time being. I'm in no particular hurry, I don't miss not being onstage and one way or the other I always seem to be performing somehow, no matter where I am.

"When I did the Madison Square Garden show, I had a sort of déjà vu feeling that I'd done it all before and this was no better or worse than it had ever been before. It felt strange and I felt like a robot doing the same thing over and over again. I'll probably go out on the road again before too long, but it's just the itty-bitty things about it that I can't stand. If something comes up that interests me, then I may do it.

"I think I'd sooner play the Roxy here than a ballpark, but the complications of someone like me doing a show anywhere are endless. I couldn't do what Paul did with Wings and just turn up at Bradford University and play. It'd have to be something more organised than that."

Right now, John is waiting for the appeal hearing for his application to remain in the USA. While the appeal hearing for his application is pending, he's just behaving naturally, and relying on a team of lawyers to keep him informed of how the case is proceeding. To this end he's kept out of the papers recently, living quietly in an apartment in central Manhattan, New York, anxious not to offend those who want to see him leave America. His only publicised appearance recently was when he went to watch the Watergate hearings in Washington.

"I only went once to see Watergate, but it made the papers because I was recognised straight away. I thought it was better on TV anyway because I could see more. When it first came on I watched it live all day, so I just had the urge to actually go. I had other business in Washington anyway.

"The public was there and most senators have children, so every time there was a break in the proceedings I had to sign autographs. I was looking like a Buddhist monk at the time with all my hair chopped off, and I thought nobody would spot me. They spotted Yoko before me, and assumed – rightly – that I must be with her. It was quite a trip."

John took part in some of the sessions for Ringo's forthcoming album, which brought three ex-Beatles together – and almost all four – for the first time since the split. "Yeah, the three of us were there, and Paul would most probably have joined in if he was around but he wasn't," said John. "I just got a call from Ringo, asking me to write a track so I did it. It seemed the natural thing to do. George has written a track and Paul has written one, but most of them are Ringo's. I like his songs. For the track that I wrote, I was on piano, Billy Preston was on organ, Ringo

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GIMME SOME TRUTH!

The Imagine Monument in Central Park is located right across from the Dakota apartment that John rented from actor Robert Ryan in June 1973. Other memorials to John include the Imagine Peace Tower, near Reykjavík, Liverpool Airport and Parque John Lennon in Havana, Cuba, opened by Fidel Castro...

was on drums, George was on guitar and Klaus Voormann was on bass."

JOHN SAYS HE talks to at least one of the three ex-Beatles every two weeks. "I've talked to Ringo a lot recently because he's just moved into my house at Ascot, which is nice because I've always got a bedroom there. I haven't talked to Paul since before he did the last tour with Wings, but I heard *Red Rose Speedway* and it was all right. I liked parts of his TV special, especially the intro. The bit filmed in Liverpool made me squirm a bit, but Paul's a pro. He always has been.

"I hear two people have left Wings now. The only news I hear is what I get from the English trade paper. Nobody tells me things, unless I ask and really, it's nothing to do with me anyway what Wings are doing."

While emphasising that he doesn't mean to be insulting to England, he says he never misses home. "I don't miss England like I didn't miss Liverpool when The Beatles moved to London. England will always be there if I choose to go back, and when I came here originally I didn't have a plan to stay. It just happened that way.

"I love New York. It's the hottest city on Earth. I haven't been everywhere in the world but it's the fastest city on Earth. The difference between New York and London is the difference between London and Liverpool. For me, New York has everything. And if I wanted to get away from it there's always New England to visit. If I feel homesick for England, I feel homesick for Cornwall or Ireland or Scotland where I went on holidays. When I think of England now, I think of my childhood or discothèques in London and in New England it's very similar with the rocks and the sea and that.

"I've got a little pad there where I can go to get away from the rush of New York, and I've got an apartment in the Dakota Building in New York which is the place they made the film *Rosemary's Baby*. I also love the millions of radio stations and TV channels and the piped TV movies I can get and things like that which you can't get in England."

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

The B-side of the "Mind Games" single, "Meat City", features a backwards and sped-up voice encouraging the listener to "check the album". If you do so, and play the album version of "Meat City" backwards, you are cordially suggested to "fuck a pig" – one of Lennon's favourite insults

John regrets that he doesn't get out to see many artists performing, a situation that stems from his being John Lennon. "I get nervous at shows. Either I have to sit in the audience and I get hassled by the crowd, or I go backstage and have to mix with the groupies and all that trip. Rod Stewart's here at the moment and I wouldn't mind seeing him. I like him. I want to see Jerry Lee Lewis, too, while he's on here. I saw Fats Domino in Las Vegas – I seem to be catching up on the ones I never saw when I was a teenager.

"I had a ticket for The Rolling Stones on the East Coast but at the time I was in Los Angeles, so I never got to see them. I haven't seen the Stones since the *Rock And Roll Circus*, which was the film that never came out. I still prefer records. They're the thing of the moment that matters. I like to see the artist occasionally, but some people have made one great record and I go for that record and don't care whatever else they've done.

"People are saying the Stones are getting too old to appear now but that's bullshit. Mick'll never be past it. I saw the TV show they did over here and it was fantastic. It was a master's performance and that's what Mick is, a master performer. The English always tear into their own artists more than others and worship Americans. Here it's the other way around. I like a lot of the new British bands, though."

I told John that Slade had been called the new Beatles...

"Hell, who wants to be the new Beatles!" he replied. "I like some of their records. They get it off. I saw them on TV here and it was all right. It must be so hard for them when they come here and they're used to being treated like God in England, but I think they'll survive. They're a good band. They're a singles band and I'm a singles man. The only reason I make albums is because you're supposed to. I haven't really got into somebody's album since I was into Elvis Presley and Carl Perkins, and even then singles were always the best.

"I'd like to see The Who when they come over here, they're like clockwork. I went to see Cheech & Chong the other night, but once is enough for them. That's another thing that puts me off playing live – the fact that you've got to do the same thing over and over again every night, and the audience wants to hear the songs you're associated with. I remember I sang 'Imagine' twice in one day when I was rehearsing it, and that bored me. I've nothing against the song, in fact I'm quite proud of it, but I just can't go on every night singing it. I'd try and vary it, but then I don't like to see that myself. If I go to watch an artist I'd expect to hear the things I know.

"I understand it from both points of view.

MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD/REDFERNS

With Eric Clapton and Keith Richards as The Dirty Mac on the set of The Rolling Stones Rock And Roll Circus, Intertel TV Studio, Wembley, London December 11, 1968

Actually I have trouble remembering lyrics. I sang 'Come Together' at Madison Square Garden for a TV show too and really I sang, '*She got hairy arseholes*' instead of what it should have been, and it was never noticed."

John admits he's dropped out a little recently, and has deliberately stopped making explosive statements that would make newspaper headlines. He says this may have something to do with his visa situation, but it's hard to tell. There has, he says, not been much to talk about.

"I think I'll always be the same whenever there's an issue. In the olden days, the *Melody Maker* would carry headlines like 'Lennon Blasts Hollies' and, not that I'd regret saying what I'd said, it would reverberate back to me for months afterwards. So then I'd drop back a little. I'm going through one of those phases now. Either Lennon is all over the place or invisible. Like other things, I don't plan it. It just happens naturally."

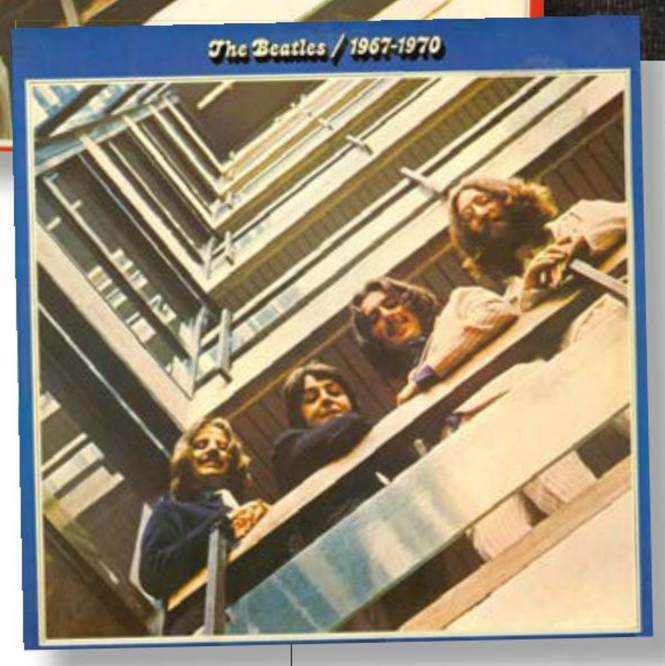
The next project coming up for John, though, is an album of oldies he's making with Phil Spector. "Phil and I have been threatening to do this for years. I want to go in and sing, '*Ooo eeh baby*'-type songs that are meaningless for a change. Whenever I'm in the studio, between takes, I mess around with oldies. I even used to do it in the studio in the Beatle days, so now I'm finally getting round to doing a John Sings The Oldies album. This will be my next album. I hope people won't think I've run out of songs, but sod it, I just want to do it.

"I'm not going to tell you what numbers I'll be doing; I don't even know for sure myself. Phil and I are sorting through loads of songs right now. I enjoy working with him, but I equally enjoyed doing the latest album on my own. There was nobody to lean on, and this was a good exercise for me. I always control everything anyway, but this time I thought I'd do it all on my own."

Conversation turns to the recent double Beatles compilations [*Beatles 1962-1966 and 1967-1970, released in April 1973*] that have been so successful, a fact which pleases Lennon almost as much as when *Imagine* creeps back into the charts. He gets a bigger kick, however, out of his own albums doing well.

"George [*Martin*]controlled the choice of the material on those albums more than any of us. They sent me lists and asked for my opinion, but I was busy at the time. I think it was the pressure of the bootlegs that finally made us put them out after all this time. Did you know that there's a bootleg out now of The Beatles' Decca audition which The Beatles did? I have a copy of it, but I'm trying to find the tape. It's beautiful. There's us singing 'To Know Her Is To Love Her', and a whole pile of tracks, mostly other people's but some of our own. It's pretty good, better than that Tony Sheridan thing on Polydor.

John and Yoko arrive at London Airport from New York, July 14, 1971



"Every time I go on TV here somebody tapes it and within a week it's in all the shops. In a way I dig it because it's good for your ego, but I know I'm not supposed to because it's against the business. I got copies made from this Decca audition and sent it to them all. I wouldn't mind actually releasing it."

I tell John I had a copy of *The Beatles Live At Shea Stadium*.

"Yes, I've got that," he says. "I think I've got them all. There's one of a Beatles show at the Hollywood Bowl which was an abortion, and there's others from everywhere we played, obscure places here in the States. It seemed someone was taping it everywhere. I think the official reissue albums came out around the right time. Maybe we'd have sold more if we'd got them out before the bootleggers, but they didn't do too badly at all. They got gold records each. They brought back the '60s."

John says he never really had a favourite Beatles number. He usually preferred whatever was current at the time. "I have a favourite of Paul's, and a favourite of George's and a favourite of my own. Of mine I like 'Strawberry Fields...' and '...Walrus', of Paul's I like 'Here, There And Everywhere', of Ringo's I like 'Honey Don't' and of George's I like 'Within You Without You'. Of course I still like 'Eleanor Rigby', and another was 'For No One'. I have favourites from different periods.

"When I first received a copy of the compilations, I was too nervous to play them in case they were mixed badly. I thought the sound was a bit rough. I heard they've tried to stereoise the old albums. I wish they hadn't. I also think they could have put some of the tracks out that were B-sides and aren't available any more. Maybe they still will."

My last question is inevitable... Any chance of us seeing the four Beatles on a stage or record together again?

"There's always a chance," grins John. "As far as I can gather from talking to them all, nobody would mind doing some work together again. There's no law that says we're not going to do something together, and no law that says we are. If we did do something I'm sure it wouldn't be permanent. We'd do it just for that moment. I think we're closer now than we have been for a long time. I call the split 'the divorce period' and none of us ever thought there'd be a divorce like that.

"That's the way things turned out. We know each other well enough to talk about it."

"Bangladesh started this big charity thing. Now people think that if I say yes, Dylan, George and God will appear too"

R. BRIGDEN/DAILY EXPRESS/GETTY IMAGES

UNCUT
JUNE, 2008

'Lennon just liked to party. But at the end of the party he wanted to destroy everything...'

In November 1973, Lennon might have been giving laidback interviews to ***Melody Maker***. But the reality of his life in LA — his "Lost Weekend" — was quite different. Girlfriend May Pang, Van Dyke Parks, Jim Keltner and more tell JOHN ROBINSON about the wild times and chaotic sessions, involving sanitary towels as headgear, sleepovers on the beach with Nilsson and the vampiric presence of Phil Spector. "John was exercising all his bad habits," recalls Keltner. "As were we all..."

MAUREEN DONALDSON/GETTY IMAGES

ALTHOUGH THE PEACE has been disturbed, and criminal damage performed, on this night in November 1973, it is probably the scream that causes the police to be summoned to the Hollywood home of John Lennon's lawyer, Harold Seider.

The evening has already been an eventful one. After dinner with friends – musicians Jim Keltner and Jesse Ed Davis; his girlfriend May Pang – Lennon has made a couple of bizarre decisions, the kind that later lead him to describe this period of his life as an uncharacteristic aberration, a "Lost Weekend".

He has picked up a sanitary napkin from the restaurant bathroom, and fixed it to his head. So attired, he has continued to the Troubadour venue, to watch the singer Ann Peebles perform. On taking his seat, Lennon has then declared his appreciation for the singer, in a most obscene manner.

But really, it's when the party returns to Lennon's borrowed residence that things take a more interesting turn. While May Pang is upstairs using the bathroom, she hears a thump, a groan, and then a deafening scream.

"You've killed him!"

"I came flying down the stairs," says May, "and there's Jesse, laid out on the floor, cold, and Jesse's wife is screaming, 'He's dead! He's dead!'

"I said 'Can you please tell me what happened?' So John lifts up his shirt, and there were these teeth marks on his stomach. John just said, 'He bit me'. So he'd hit Jesse with a Coke bottle."

When the police arrive, they do so to confront a scene of unimaginable weirdness. Hysterical screaming. A half-conscious Native American guitarist. And a man who had until recently been one quarter of the most famous pop group in the world. What had happened here? Little do they know it, but the scene will prove to be analogous to Lennon's entire 15-month exile in Los Angeles: part domestic disturbance, part case of temporary insanity, part party that got *way* out of hand.

"It wasn't like John was an alcoholic or tortured," says Jim Keltner. "He was just a partier who, at the end of the party, wanted to destroy everything..."

Anyone investigating tonight's events might decide the impetus for all this destruction lay with a cluster of issues. Lennon's recent separation from his wife, Yoko Ono. His continuing contractual wrangles with The Beatles. The suspicion that the FBI were watching his every move. And at the top of the heap, a problematic album of 1950s standards Lennon was then making with Phil Spector, which would come to be called, in the then very far-off days of its completion, *Rock'N'Roll*.

"The first night was fun. But as the evening wore on and everyone got more screwed up, it just fell apart"

IT'S NOT HARD to see why revisiting his musical past might have held some appeal. On the most straightforward level, it allowed him to give kudos to the musicians who had inspired him – an indulgence, but a permissible one, from a rock star who had earned the right to do what he wanted.

Financially speaking, it would enable him to put his house in order with heavyweight publisher Morris Levy. Lennon had interpolated a line ("*Here come old flat-top*") from the Levy-owned Chuck Berry song "You Can't Catch Me" into The Beatles' "Come Together", and since then promised to reach a settlement with him, by recording some more Levy-owned songs.

Maybe most significantly, this was to be a project on which Lennon could blow off steam: forget his personal turmoil, and absent his creative responsibilities, all the while hanging out with some old friends. *Gold Hat*, as Lennon had punningly conceived of it, would be a blast, an in-and-out job. The producer was to be P hil Spector.

"It was weird," says May Pang. "Phil would come to our house to talk about songs. He would come round to talk about songs, but he would only come round after sundown, and always leave before sunrise. I remember saying to my girlfriend, 'We should get a mirror, maybe he's a vampire...'"

If the preamble to the sessions seemed strange, the sessions themselves at A&M Studios were weirder still. When the first was called, for 7.30pm on a night in early November, Lennon and Pang arrived at the studio to find it nearly deserted. Even taking into account the laidback practices of the LA music business, this was spectacularly casual. When the musicians did begin to arrive, they did so in droves: though this was in principle a simple rock'n'roll session, by the time the band started to set up, there were 27 musicians present.

When they finally got underway, under the gaze of Spector, the sessions proceeded to become a scene of musical, alcoholic and chemical excess.

"The first song they did for that album was 'Bony Moronie'," says May Pang. "By this time we had waited for Phil for three hours, and now everybody's blitzed. By the time John came to sing his guide vocal he was half drunk – and there's Phil, waving around this wand. He had a wand to conduct proceedings. Every day was something different. You see the man come in one day dressed as a doctor, the next as a karate expert."

"Phil was in great shape," says Jim Keltner. "He was very funny, he would always wear a costume to the session. One night, he came dressed as a butcher, with a white bloodstained coat, which is kind of ironic, you know? And he had stickers for everyone to put on their lapels, he gave everybody a name.

"That first night was fun," Keltner continues, "but as the evening wore on and everyone got more and more screwed up, it just fell apart. The tempos dropped, and as for the singing – John was just totally pissed and gone. And this went on for a while..."

Not only was this a very large, often very intoxicated group of musicians – among them legends like Nicky Hopkins, José Feliciano, Dr John, Leon Russell and Hal Blaine – it was also an extremely conspicuous one. Rather than a closed session, a place of serious business, the A&M lot became a magnet for celebrities, eager to watch the exiled ex-Beatle and his charabanc in increasingly irregular action.

"There were constant interruptions," remembers May Pang. "David Geffen. Cher. Warren Beatty. It was horrible. Joni Mitchell was in the studio next door and she was so fascinated that John and all these musicians were in there she kept coming in. I'll never forget, one time we were in the middle of a take, and she said, 'Does anyone have change of a dollar?' Phil was screaming, 'I'm gonna lock the door! I'm gonna swallow the key!'"

"The studio was just trashed," says Roy Cicala, an engineer and then owner of the Record Plant East, who had worked with Lennon since *Imagine*. "Not trashed electrically, but like after a party. It was ridiculous – here we are trying to get the musicians to play, and there are 18 people in a control room that only fit 10. A lot of times we had

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

The Smothers Brothers, Tommy and Dick perform at the Troubadour in West Hollywood on March 12, 1974

Harry Nilsson knocks back a Brandy Alexander – cognac and cream – as Lennon kisses May Pang, at The Troubadour on March 12, 1974

to escort Phil out of the room to talk in the hallway so we could get on with it."

As disorderly as the sessions were, though, the greatest influence on the protracted business of completing the *Rock'N'Roll* album was one particular feature of Spector's increasingly paranoid professional practice. Rather than leaving them in the studio, it was Spector's habit, after every session, to keep custody of the tapes.

"Sometimes he would put the master tapes in the back of his car and drive away, because he was afraid that somebody was going to steal them," says Roy Cicala. "The next night, he'd say, 'Here, take them home with you...' It was different every day – you never knew what was going to happen."

This bizarre behaviour provided an alarming intimation of what was to come. At the end of the Christmas holiday of 1973/74, Phil compounded the madness of the LA *Rock'N'Roll* sessions into one decisive act of musical hostage-taking. He loaded the tapes into his car, and drove off the studio lot, never to return.

Shortly afterwards, he apparently suffered injuries in a car accident.

Whatever, he stopped answering the phone.

WITH THE SESSIONS for *Rock'N'Roll* effectively concluded until the tapes could be recovered, Lennon went into the first months of 1974 with a loose agenda. His friend Harry Nilsson had astutely arranged a deal with RCA for Lennon to produce his new album, but until then, Lennon was set adrift in LA. Surrounded by a sympathetic rolling cast of friendly faces – Ringo Starr, Keith Moon, Jim Keltner, Mick Jagger – the atmosphere was right for a mix of musical business and alcoholic pleasure.

Certainly, some of the music created in these jams sometimes proved little more than documentary evidence in support of an anecdote – like the "Toot And Snore" session, where Lennon plays guitar while a vacationing Paul McCartney plays Ringo's drums. Some, however, is simply astonishing.

Occasioned during a meeting of the 'Jim Keltner Fan Club Hour', an informal meeting of minds for musicians with time on their hands, the recording of "Too Many Cooks" – finally released on Mick Jagger's *Best Of* album in 2007 – was an example of how the 'come all ye' policy of 1974 could sometimes go right.

With Lennon producing, Jagger fronted a lineup featuring Danny 'Kootch' Kortchmar, Jack Bruce, Bobby Keys and Al Kooper to produce a sound characteristic of the time. This, you might call Millionaires' Soul: a meeting of saxes, virtuosity and bonhomie – the same kind of sound Lennon had been making on the best of the songs for *Rock'N'Roll*. Given the results, perhaps the Lost Weekend wasn't entirely a lost cause.

"They call it the 'Lost Weekend' because of the Ray Milland movie," says Jim Keltner. "But in that, Ray Milland was a tortured, alcoholic guy. There was nothing tortured about John. The only torture John would show would be at the end of the night."

In the company of Nilsson, however, Lennon was seeing the end of a great many more such nights. In March 1974, the pair went to see the Smothers Brothers comedy show at the Troubadour. Fuelled by Nilsson's favoured beverage, the Brandy Alexander, Lennon began heckling the pair.

"The Smothers Brothers had a TV show which was very politically charged," says Van Dyke Parks, who joined Lennon and Nilsson that night, "and it had been cancelled, because it was too liberal for the times.

"So we went to pay homage. And of course, we were intoxicated, with alcohol, and probably, cocaine. I was higher than a hog's ass in a nose dive. Harry loved Tommy Smothers, so it was embarrassing, and for John too, who was this enemy alien and was being

CONTINUES OVER »

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

Aside from the debauchery, Lennon's spell away from Yoko allowed him – with the encouragement of May Pang – the chance to reconnect with his estranged first son, Julian. John even bought Julian a Gibson Les Paul guitar and a drum machine for Christmas 1973

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

"THE WILD BUNCH"
Ten key players in the Lost Weekend

JOHN LENNON

"John was in a very different frame of mind at that time. He was kind of on his own, and he was exercising all his bad habits, as were we all..." - JIM KELTNER

MAY PANG

"When Yoko and John had to separate, Yoko advised John to take May Pang with him. May is a great girl." - JIM KELTNER

PHIL SPECTOR

"Phil was drinking a bottle of Courvoisier a night. He was always asking, 'Do I have full control?' I wondered, 'Did we make a mistake here?'" – MAY PANG

HARRY NILSSON

"Harry was an opportunist, absolutely. But Harry was a genius, and a very motivated individual." - VAN DYKE PARKS

JIM KELTNER

"The main guy John had was Jim Keltner. You need that one person in there who has it down, and can help call all the other musicians in." - MAY PANG

JESSE ED DAVIS

"He was a very up, fun kind of person. A very friendly guy. When we went to Morris Levy's he brought his .45 with him on the plane." - ED MOTTAU

MORRIS LEVY

"He was very hospitable, but there was definitely a Mafiosi feel about the whole thing." - ED MOTTAU

KLAUS VOORMANN

"I first played with Klaus Voormann on 'Jealous Guy'. He was on a lot of those great records. He had a similar feel for the music." - JIM KELTNER

PAUL McCARTNEY

"Paul broke Ringo's drumhead while we were playing. I went 'Oh my god, that was the Ed Sullivan head.' He said, 'Oh, I'll get him another one.'" - JIM KELTNER

KEITH MOON

"Keith decided to go and live in LA. Ringo did, then Harry did. Then there it was – the Wild Bunch."
- DOUGAL BUTLER, MOON'S ROADIE AND RIGHT-HAND MAN

watched by Richard Nixon... he didn't need any bad publicity."

The Lennon-Nilsson party was summarily ejected from the club, part of a familiar pattern of behaviour that, by now, Jim Keltner was becoming accustomed to. But if there was a root cause for Lennon's riotous behaviour, though, Keltner perceived it to be in the recent upheavals in his personal life.

"Once, Jesse Ed and I were thrown in the back of a Cadillac with him, to hold him down," Keltner says. "He pushed us down in the well of the car. And then he tried to kick out the windows, and the whole time he was screaming 'Yoko! Yoko! Yoko!'"

For Van Dyke Parks, Lennon's behaviour seemed far more a symptom of the political oppression of the times. Rather than simply boorish drinking buddies, Parks found in Nilsson and Lennon a pair of lucid thinkers, whose lifestyle was less an absenting of responsibility, more a new form of protest. They were, they maintained, filled with *rage*. "I think that a lot of it was drug-induced," says Parks. "I really think that cocaine has that deleterious effect on the psyche. But all that, of course, was because of the enormous frustration that any common man might feel who was frustrated and left powerless in his attempts to bring peace to our time."

However eloquently the pair might have talked up their game, the fact remained, however, that Nilsson's album *Pussy Cats*, when it appeared, was a far less articulate statement. Like *Rock'N'Roll*, a collection partly comprised of favourite oldies, although the album projects a good deal of camaraderie, but it could not conceal the tragedy of Nilsson's increasingly damaged voice. Though Lennon's party had undeniably had some spectacular moments, as it drew to a close, there would be casualties.

"One night, Harry and John were so blasted they ended up asleep on the beach, and they woke up with the sun coming down," says Keltner. "What Harry always told me is, 'That's the morning I realised I lost my voice...'

"He believed that after that, he could never hit a high note again."

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

Lennon decided he wanted to be a 'rocker' after hearing Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel". The King and Lennon first met on August 27, 1965, when Presley invited The Beatles back to his home in Bel Air, California. Elvis was unsure of John's name, so he addressed him simply as 'Beatle'

WHILE LENNON had been carousing, Al Coury, an executive vice president at Capitol Records, had been working against impossible odds to get it back on track.

If Coury hadn't found Spector, he had at least found Spector's lawyer – and a problem he could help solve. At this time, Spector had a deal with Warner Brothers, who had advanced him hundreds of thousands of dollars. When the time came to record Lennon, signed to Capitol, he had simply used Warners' money.

"Spector's lawyer was anxious to get the money back to Warners," says Coury. "They were irate. They were crazed that Phil Spector spent their money recording an artist they had no rights to."

Coury arranged a switch: he would hand over a cheque in exchange for the tapes. Once his engineers had inventoried them, Coury put them on a plane to New York, where he was met by Lennon. "He had four limousines at the airport," says Coury. "He couldn't get a truck, so we stacked the tapes in the limos. He was over the moon. He

Another night at The Troubadour, LA on November 21, 1973, this time with Alice Cooper

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Regular guys: Lennon and guests celebrate at The Troubadour, LA on November 21, 1973

never thought he was going to get them back."

What Lennon heard, however, when he played the tapes after finishing *Walls And Bridges* in late 1974, filled him with horror.

"He wouldn't listen to it until September," says May Pang. "He didn't like the way it was recorded, you couldn't take the vocal off it. Even I was cringeing... John had never spent that amount of money on an album. *Mind Games* cost $60,000. *Walls And Bridges* cost $60,000. But already, he had spent over $100,000 for nine songs. It really disturbed John. He didn't like wasting that kind of money."

Though he had been heading anyway towards an epiphany about his excessive drinking, this was a sobering experience. With a renewed sense of purpose, Lennon then assembled a core group of musicians – Jim Keltner on drums, Jesse Ed Davis and Eddie Mottau on guitar; long-term associate Klaus Voormann on bass – to try and rescue the project by recording new material from scratch, this time, in New York. For Roy Cicala, this fact alone was good news.

"In New York, I felt it was more business," says Roy. "We were more ethical about it. In LA, a lot of things didn't get done. Or people thought it was a party. It wasn't a party, you know? We were trying to get a record done."

"John had spent over $100,000 for nine songs. It really disturbed him. He didn't like wasting that kind of money"

Particularly since Lennon's obligation to Morris Levy was still hanging over him. Though anxious to get his payback, Levy was not, however, slow to extend his generosity to the Lennon project. In order to expedite it, he offered Lennon and his musicians the hospitality of his compound in upstate New York, saying they could stay and rehearse there in preparation for recording.

It was a statement of faith Lennon felt he could repay. To show that he intended to follow through with the project, he gave Levy a listening tape of the Spector sessions – a decision that would ultimately cause the project yet more grief, when Levy decided to release the tape as the TV-advertised, mail-order album *Roots*.

When the band returned to New York, though, it was as a lean rock'n'roll unit, who immediately set to work.

"A typical session was probably six or seven hours," recalls guitarist Ed Mottau. "I guess John had had a bad time in LA and was off the sauce, so this was no bullshit, just 'OK guys, no-one gets anything to drink until we get something down...' Jim Keltner would say to me, 'Can you ask him if we can just have a little white wine or something?'"

A little late in the day, perhaps, but those disciplined East Coast sessions drew a line under Lennon's Lost Weekend. It would be a while before his relationship with May Pang would peter out, and longer still before his litigation with Morris Levy would be settled. The fact remained that on its release in February 1975, Lennon, now sober, and taken back by Yoko, bore as little relation to the boozy, erratic artist who had recorded these cover versions as he did to the surly rocker he was when he posed for Jurgen Wollmer's 1961 cover photo.

Today, the music on *Rock'N'Roll* now seems most powerful when considered completely within its own context: as the soundtrack to a time when pure idealism came face to face with pure excess. When the world got tougher, the musicians, in turn, partied harder.

"Decadence is a beautiful thing," says Van Dyke Parks. "My favourite season is autumn: when you see something in the flower of death. That is what this was like, in a way. What the Lost Weekend represents to me is a significant benchmark in that whole generational convolution. It was an amazing time."

RICHARD CREAMER/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

'I still get recognised. I think it's me nose...'

NME
JANUARY 19, 1974

The Lost Weekend continues, and Lennon's frustration with not having a visa becomes ever greater. Together with ANDREW TYLER, he concocts a poignant appeal to the Queen, and reflects on how The Man is clamping down on him and his fellow rock revolutionaries. Some time, too, to appraise the Goons and hardcore porn...

JOHN RODGERS/REDFERNS

» **NME** JANUARY 19, 1974

DEAR QUEEN

I don't know if you ever read the New Improved *NME* – if not, maybe some hepcat of the Royal Household will pass on the word.

Now that you've seen young Anne married off to her heartthrob cavalier [*Princess Anne married Captain Mark Phillips in November 1973*], and what with Charles playing googlies with Lady Jane [*Wellesley, a purported girlfriend at the time*] all around, maybe you'll have time to reflect on the dilemma of one John Lennon, a Liverpool slum-kid genius who used to play in The Beatles and who, at the peak of his career, committed a kind of revolutionary hara-kiri when he returned your MBE medal.

It was a far out medal, your majesty, ace organic and nice on the chest, but it wasn't actually you, as a mum and companion of the horses, he was getting at. It was all that Services To Exports/Build A Better Britain/Screw The Man On The Factory Floor bit that brought a lump to his shaving bowl.

Anyway, after the medal dumping ceremony he kept getting visited at queer hours by squadrons of policemen and, before you could say cold turkey, John was being court-martialled for possession of marijuana – a substance he swears was absent from his life around this time.

He now lives in New York City but because of his record the authorities over there won't give him a Green residents' card, which means if he leaves the country he'll never be allowed back in.

So now, our Queen, it's all down to you. All you have to do is say, "OK you nurds, enough's enough, I pardon thee John Lennon, on your feet and have a nice new year," and everything's back to normal.

John's not one to beg and grovel at your Royal appendages, but on the phone recently he did say it would be a great way out. So what do you think? There's a whole bunch of us who'd love to see John over here again for the odd visit.

And you know something, it's the only thing preventing John, Paul, George and Ringo working together again. Paul, you see, also got busted for substances and he's not allowed into the States any more. Ironic, isn't it?

Love etc.

"I would have thought I've done more good for Britain than harm, wouldn't you?" John enquired over a faint line from Los Angeles.

Yes, I would have thought so.

"Did I tell you about the commercial we've done for the new album? Hah. It's great. We have the Queen plugging the record for us. It starts inside the house with a gate swinging open over a red carpet and then inside. It's all done in very good taste, Your Majesty. It's a friend of mine in drag, as it were.

"There's 'Land Of Hope And Glory' and someone says, [*in a plummy warbling voice*] 'I've been asked to do this commercial. It relates to a gramophone record...' and it goes on like that. I'm hoping Her Majesty will be able to laugh at it."

He won't say who the friend is, but here's a clue. He works for Apple and he's a real queen. The correct answer is not Allen Klein.

"A few vodkas and it was all over," John reports. "His identity will be revealed by himself. I'm not sure how much he wants people to know about it."

Did he see the bonding of Mark and Anne, and was he profoundly moved?

"Who?"

Young Mark and Anne.

"Oh yes."

What was your reaction to that?

"I didn't really have one."

Did they show it over there?

"Yeah. They had it on from two o'clock until dawn, or something. So we had the single. We didn't get to see the album, though. I thought they looked all right. But I didn't really feel that much about it. I thought Anne's figure looked nice. They should have held it in Belfast, though.

"I was thinking of writing to the Queen, you know. I hope she reads *NME*. Yeah, I was after a pardon for being planted by the cops and being hassled for three years and everything that happened. That's one way to solve the problem. That so-called bust I was involved in has left me with a criminal record. That's the legal reason they're trying to throw me out. If that was taken away there'd be nothing they could do."

Now here's a weird twist. The cop who starred in the Lennon bust has, himself, been incarcerated for four years for perjury relating to a drug bust case.

Detective Sergeant Norman Pilcher has just been put down for four years. At the trial all sorts of stuff came up. Conspiracy and the like. But Lennon suspects the case of the malfunctioning blue meanie is unlikely to affect his own case directly...

"The thing is, in those days we were clean. We didn't have any stuff. But they kept on hassling and hassling and bothering Yoko and the deal was that if they left Yoko alone – and she was pregnant at the time – I'd cop a plea. And now the real answer is for me to get a pardon... but because I'm a naughty boy, I don't suppose they want to give me one."

What he's still trying to figure out all these years later is what those gloating reporters and photographers were doing outside his place when he and Yoko were being escorted to the cells. Jack Warner and Edgar Lustgarten [*of TV crime shows Dixon Of Dock Green and The Scales Of Justice*] had always intimated that an arrest was a private business... restricted to the "guilty parties" and the officers concerned. Why the jamboree?

Lennon has an explanation. "A friend of mine from Fleet Street gave me a call after he'd overheard a cop in a pub saying how he was going to get The Beatles. Yeah, he was gonna get The Beatles. Which meant me. I mean, he's not about to bust Ringo or Paul. I was really up for grabs, what with *Two Virgins* and living in sin with a foreigner and all."

Is our Queen about to be sympathetic to Lennon's plight? Can she relate to her stone-turning expat? They'd hardly make suitable tango partners, but they do have at least one common point of interest: the Goons.

Yessir. Like Prince Charlie, Sister Margie and Tony Legstrong-Jones [*Princess Margaret and her then-husband, Antony Armstrong-Jones*], the Queen is alleged to have chuckled along with the Goons after her Sunday joint... not unlike Lennon, who recently reviewed *The Goon Show Scripts* for *The New York Times*.

"It was a bit like doing a school essay," he says. "But like all my generation I was really drawn to the Goons. In many ways they influenced The Beatles as much as rock'n'roll – Elvis and Little Richard. They were, to my generation, what we were to the next.

"I admire them all – but I've always reckoned Spike [*Milligan*] was the real lunatic."

What about the trenchcoat warfare? Is he still being visited and molested by the American gendarmerie?

"A year or so back they were following me around everywhere I went. But I suppose they must have got bored going to the studio and hanging around for hours at a time. And they were tapping my phone. I think they wanted me to know they were doing it, too, because I kept hearing heavy breathing. It scared me at first, but now it's a bit of a joke. No, I wasn't on Nixon's list of unfriendlies, but I was on *somebody's* list, that's for sure."

There's a pattern to it all, he suggests. Not necessarily a co-ordinated conspiracy, but a series of connected happenings that have numbered all the leading '60s cult figures.

Lennon's marooned in America, McCartney outside of it. The Stones are having to tread very lightly indeed, and Hendrix, Morrison and Joplin are dead.

"If they can separate all the big names in pop, they effectively cut off the 'revolution' at its source. No more Woodstocks. No more mass gatherings. The real changes aren't gonna come from politicians. It's going to come from the artists and musicians. Even Bowie is a threat in a way."

Explain yourself, sir.

"Well if you get Bowie on TV and somebody switches on in Ohio or Bradford and they see this person looking out at them, it's going to affect their whole way of life. He doesn't have to say, 'Power To The People Right On'. He is the message in himself. It's like holding a mirror up to society.

"I just think it's all great. I'm not saying I'd do it, but people like Bowie are an extension of rock'n'roll. He still rocks like shit and keeps us going until the next phenomenon, ho ho, which is going to be this year, isn't it?"

Maybe the very next sensation will be curvaceous Ringo, whose single is hot stuff in the States and whose LP leapt into the *Billboard* charts at No 4 – two better than *Mind Games*.

"I sent him a telegram last week saying, 'Congratulations. How dare you. Write me a hit song.' It's the first real pop album he's made and it's a good album. He deserves it. He's going to need all the royalties he can get to paper Ascot [*the home he just bought from Lennon*]. He's going to need that hit just to keep up the garden."

John's own album didn't receive quite the same dazzling response, although it's nowhere near the bunch of horselicks Tony Tyler suggested in his *NME* review. Tracks like "Out The Blue", "I Know (I Know)" and "Bring On The Lucie" are

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

Lennon holds the 2010 Guinness World Record for recording pseudonyms, with 21. His most famous alias is Dr Winston O'Boogie, as credited on Harry Nilsson's records. Others include Rev Thumbs O'Ghurkin, Captain Kundalini, Booker Table And The Maître D's and The Hon John St John Johnson

Wrong side of the law: London, 1968 – the UK conviction for possession that grievously affected Lennon's US Green Card application through the '70s

sumptuous groovers that fairly parallel his work on "Imagine". Honest.

Was he after the grumbling T Tyler's noodles?

"I'm going to send 'im a deaf aid and a book of instructions on How To Write. Obviously I'd prefer it if he, or whoever it is, liked it – but I'm not about to cut my throat, if that's what you mean. A lot of times you get critics reviewing themselves, so if they do slag you off it doesn't mean anything or, if they overdo the praise bit, that means nothing either.

"Praise is never satisfactory unless you can be sure the person has actually listened to your work and knows it inside out. I'm not saying people should spend their lives making in-depth appraisals of me albums – but praise, or the other thing, doesn't count for much unless they've taken the time to understand what you're doing."

Right on.

John was due for a critical trampling. After the suffocating Best Album In The Universe stuff tipped over *Imagine* and the *Plastic Ono Band* LP, coupled with the knifings Paul has had to deflect since The Split, Lennon only had to put one foot wrong – as he did with *Some Time In New York City* – for the blades to be turned on him. Critics were feeling remorse at the way they growled at McCartney and Lennon was the obvious target upon which to assuage their embarrassment.

"I would say ...*New York City* stands as a piece of work. It sold 200,000 instead of half a million. The whole thing's relative. If I'd been a smaller artist I'd have been pleased to get that amount of sales. I have no regrets... only that it didn't get a lot of airplay on the so-called FM stations of the Left.

"The only one that really got into it was 'Pacifica', which has heavy programmes on politics, lesbians and things like that – anything people want to do. It's a pretty good station. They've even got tapes of Yoko and me from the '60s singing Japanese folk songs."

Talking of oldies, he is now well into his Oldies Mouldies album, currently being waxed at A&M in Los Angeles with a spellbinding cast of several millions. On the guestlist so far are, among others: Steve Cropper, Jim Keltner, Hal Blaine, José Feliciano, Leon Russell, Jeff Barry, Barry Mann and Jesse Ed Davis.

We called George the other day and said he was having a great time. George said he was on his way and hasn't been heard of since. Paul, of course, won't be able to make it.

"Yeah, I miss Paul a lot. It's been a year since I've seen him. He came over with Linda to me place in New York. 'Course I'd like to see him again. He's an old friend, isn't he?"

He says he can move around a bit more freely now... for meals and odd visits to the movies.

"I still get recognised, though. I think it's me nose. But I can generally go to the movies. The last film I saw was *Behind The Green Door.*"

How was it?

"The first 45 minutes were interesting, then it got a bit boring. When you've seen one cock, you've seen them all."

ANDREW MACLEAR/GETTY IMAGES

WALLS AND BRIDGES

A chastened Lennon yearns for Yoko and another hit — and gets one, thanks to a little help from a new superstar friend. BY DAVID CAVANAGH

RELEASE DATE
04 OCTOBER 1974

ON A PLEASANT morning in 1996, David Bowie's tour bus is making the 200-mile journey from New York to Boston, where Bowie will play a world tour warm-up gig at the Avalon club later that night. To pass the time on the bus, he and his band watch a video: a documentary about John Lennon's adventures in the Big Apple. For a Lennon fan, it's sufficiently diverting to while away an hour – but then you remember that Bowie wasn't just a fan, he was a *friend*. Sitting on the sidelines, I can see Bowie becoming visibly irritated by one of the film's featured interviewees – a critic and biographer – who keeps taking lugubrious snipes at the ex-Beatle's solo career. Such-and-such an album was "emblematic of Lennon's songwriting decline". Another was "typical of Lennon's creative dissipation".

The chances look slim that he'll have anything complimentary to say about *Walls And Bridges*, but I never get the opportunity to find out. The next time he appears onscreen he says, "The 1974 album W*alls*..." "Oh, SHUT the FUCK up," cries Bowie in exasperation, before apologising to everyone. "Sorry... sorry... but I mean... where do they get these idiots from anyway?"

As Bowie clearly knew, there's more, much more, to an appreciation of *Walls And Bridges* than thumping the table and waxing dogmatic. So let's board another tour bus. It's 1994 and James (of "Sit Down" fame) are doing one of those gruelling, psychically draining all-night drives through America. As the sun rises on a new day, singer Tim Booth goes up front to talk to the driver. They listen to an FM radio station. Suddenly the DJ plays a piece of music so beautiful that it makes Booth gasp. The melodies seem to come from a land where the grass is uncommonly lush and the fruit indescribably succulent. A man wanders mazily through an enchanting Eden, rubbing his eyes. "*So long ago*," he sighs. "*Was it in a dream?*" The words float in and out of meaning, sometimes yielding to slumber and nonsense, sometimes laying little landmines to boobytrap the emotionally unwary. If the song can be summed up in a single word, it is Rapture.

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 | Going Down ★★★
2 | Whatever Gets You Thru The Night ★★★
3 | Old Dirt Road ★★★
4 | What You Got ★★★
5 | Bless You ★★★★★
6 | Scared ★★★★
7 | #9 Dream ★★★★★
8 | Surprise Surprise ★★★
9 | Steel And Glass ★★★★
10 | Beef Jerky ★★★
11 | Nobody Loves You ★★★
12 | Ya Ya ★

2005 REISSUE BONUS TRACKS

12 | Whatever Gets You Thru The Night (Live with the Elton John band) ★★★
12 | Nobody Loves You (When You're Down And Out) alternative version ★★★
12 | John Interview (by Bob Mercer)

- **Released:** October 4, 1974
- **Produced by:** John Lennon
- **Recorded:** Record Plant, New York (June–July 1974)
- **Personnel:** John Lennon (lead, harmony and background vocals; lead, rhythm and acoustic guitar; piano, whistling and percussion); Ken Ascher (electric piano, clavinet and mellotron); Jim Keltner (drums); Arthur Jenkins (percussion); Nicky Hopkins (piano); Klaus Voormann (bass); Bobby Keys (tenor saxophone); Jesse Ed Davis (lead and acoustic guitar); The New York Philharmonic Orchestra; Little Big Horns; Julian Lennon (drums on "Ya-ya"); Elton John (piano and harmony vocals on "Whatever Gets You Thru the Night" and hammond organ and background vocals on "Surprise, Surprise (Sweet Bird of Paradox)"); Joey Dambra, Lori Burton and May Pang (background vocals on "#9 Dream")
- **Highest chart position:** UK 6; US 1

John Lennon June 1952 AGE 11
Walls and Bridges
Mimi

Apple Records – All Rights of the Manufacturer and of the Owner of the Recorded Work Reserved
WALLS AND BRIDGES
33 1/3
Mfd. in U.K.
SIDE 1
("An E.M.I. Recording")
1. GOING DOWN ON LOVE. Lennon Music. ATV Music Ltd.
2. WHATEVER GETS YOU THRU THE NIGHT. Lennon Music. ATV Music Ltd.
3. OLD DIRT ROAD. Lennon Music. ATV Music Ltd.
4. WHAT YOU GOT. Lennon Music. ATV Music Ltd.
5. BLESS YOU. Lennon Music. ATV Music Ltd.
6. SCARED. Lennon Music. ATV Music Ltd.
(Lennon except * Lennon—Nilsson)
JOHN LENNON
Produced and Arranged by John Lennon
STEREO
PCTC 253
(YEX.937)
An Apple Record
℗ 1974
EMI Records Ltd.
Unauthorised Public Performance, Broadcasting and Copying of this Record Prohibited

With Elton John at Madison Square Garden, Thanksgiving night, November 28, 1974

Gazing out of the window at a half-awake, yawning America, Tim Booth feels the tears come. Before long he's joined by another bandmember, who asks him what's wrong. Booth gestures helplessly to the radio. Soon the other bandmember, too, is crying. I love that story so much, because it takes place in the human heart, not in a specific location, and no matter where it happened, it's a place where every fan of music has been.

The song was "#9 Dream", from *Walls And Bridges*, possibly the most divine piece of music Lennon ever made. To achieve it, he ran contrary to some of the maxims we know he set great store by. On his most acclaimed records (*John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*, *Imagine*) he was a writer who mistrusted metaphor and a musician who favoured the simplest patterns and structures. On "#9 Dream", he tore up the rulebooks, surrendered to beauty and brought in the surrealist heavy mob. The song's arrangement (written by Lennon's American keyboard player Ken Ascher) is a feathery ecstasy of strings, electric pianos and George Harrisonesque wah-wah slide. In the lyrics, as in many dreams, certain ghosts of the past are glimpsed. The blurred edges ("*More I cannot say, what more can I say?*") recall the legendary indecision of "Strawberry Fields...", while the "*heat-whispered trees*" provide a graceful reminder of the "*bent-backed tulips*" once observed in "Glass Onion". A song about a dream becomes a dream itself in the process of telling us about the dream that inspired it! "*I thought I could feel music touching my soul/Something warm, sudden cold/The spirit dance was unfolding.*" For a man who supposedly gave up poetry when he threw in his lot with the realism school, that is one hell of a linguistic rebirth.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

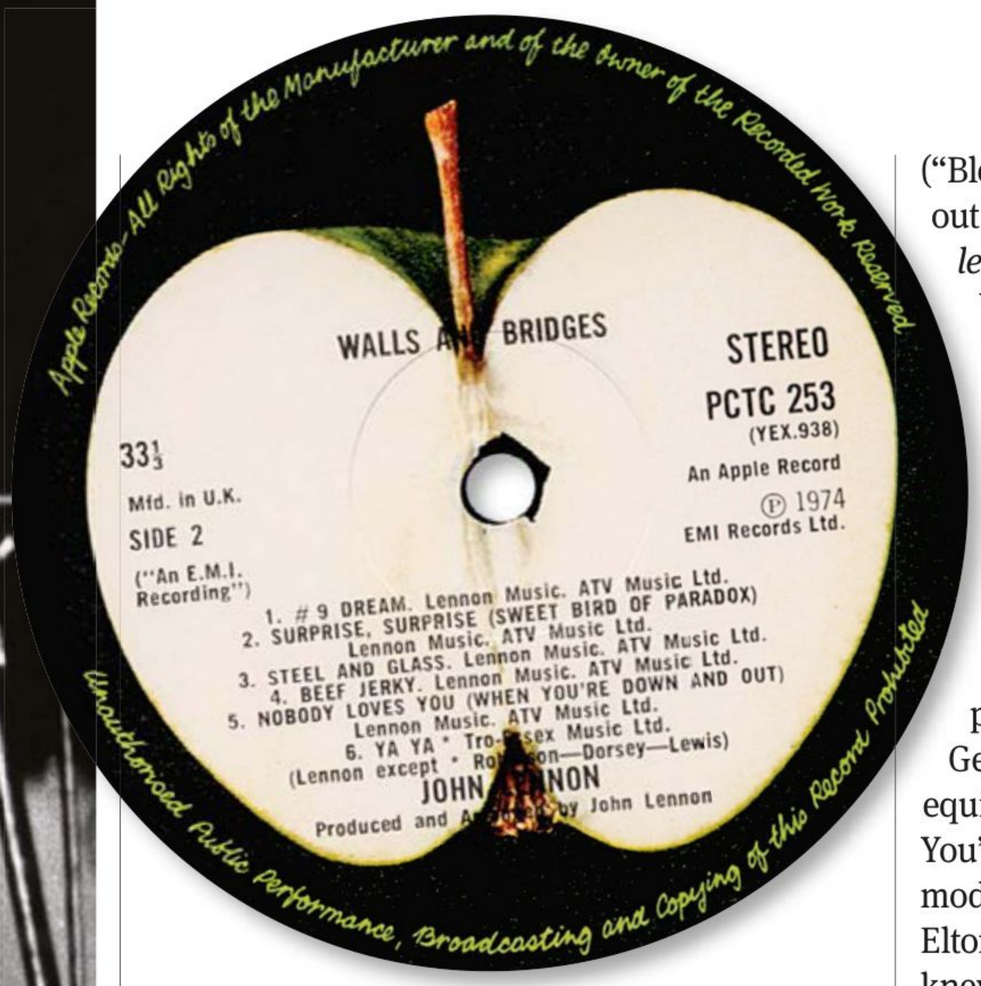
"The playing is faultless and the production as silky as any discerning hi-fi buff could want. And Lennon himself sings great..." *Charles Shaar Murray, NME, Oct 5, 1974*

"Compulsive, melodic, lyrically strong... [it's] a joy to hear words and music by a musician who has a rare talent for selling love without making you cringe..." *Ray Coleman, Melody Maker, Oct 19, 1972*

FULL OF MOOD swings and conflicting emotions, *Walls And Bridges* was recorded in the summer of 1974, roughly 10 months into Lennon's 'Lost Weekend'. He had separated from Yoko, moved to Los Angeles, begun work on a rock'n'roll covers album with Phil Spector, indulged in drunken benders with Harry Nilsson and Keith Moon, and finally moved back to New York with a clearer head and a less kamikaze outlook. To draw a line under his inebriated madness on the West Coast, he imposed a 'no booze' rule during rehearsals and recording sessions for *Walls And Bridges* at New York's Record Plant. It was to be an album of original songs, unlike the Spector project, with no particular plan or concept in mind. The disappointing chart positions of *Mind Games* (and its title track, a single) had forced Lennon to accept that he was no longer the pre-eminent singer-songwriter of his day, at least in commercial terms. It made him wistful rather than bitter. Philip Norman's Lennon biography quotes an LA-based publicist, Sharon Lawrence, saying that he would often ask her in 1973–4, "Do you think I'll ever have a hit record again?"

As he pored over his weekly copy of *Billboard*, he would have registered the chart-topping names with mixed feelings. Here was the glam-rock superstar and new-sheriff-in-town Elton John ("Bennie And The Jets"). Here was Paul McCartney, back on top form with *Band On The Run*. Here was onetime Plastic Ono Band guitarist Eric Clapton, making a poignant return with *461 Ocean Boulevard*. Even Ringo, for God's sake, had scored a No 1 hit with "You're Sixteen". On the radio and in the hit parades, when the vogue wasn't for glam or nostalgia, it was for soft-rock sophistication and long laidback midnights at the oasis. Could Lennon prevail? Could he even compete? He retained drummer Jim Keltner and pianist/arranger Ken Ascher from *Mind Games*, pairing Keltner once again with Klaus Voormann

STEVE MORLEY/REDFERNS



(bass) who had been absent from the previous year's sessions. To play lead guitar, he hired the Native American bluesman Jesse Ed Davis. Bobby Keys (sax) and Nicky Hopkins (piano) also contributed. But it would be another pianist who made the most far-reaching contribution of all.

The strengths of *Walls And Bridges* are its songwriting, singing, musicianship, arrangements and production – a blend of disciplines that reads dry on the page, but is so difficult to get right that Lennon himself seems not to have realised how successfully he pulled it off. Considering it contains a US No 1 ("Whatever Gets You Thru The Night") and a breathtaking solid-gold classic ("#9 Dream"), it always seems a bit odd that he elected to start the album with a slow scene-setter ("Going Down On Love") that takes a while to spark into life. The first music we hear – Lennon's voice shadowing a bluesy phrase from (most likely) his own electric guitar – is a bit like the intro to "Well Well Well" without the malevolence.

But if "Going Down On Love" doesn't exactly get us off to a flying start, it has other qualities that are highly germane. The sassy stabs of brass and the delicately 'melodic' percussion let us know that we're listening to one of John Lennon's most *musical* albums. Prone in the past to employing his musicians as labourers, here he features them as specialists. *Walls And Bridges* dates from an age when 'skilled studio player' was not some horrible insult, and when Steely Dan and Little Feat were making funky virtuosity seem desperately attractive. Lennon and his musicians – and brass-and-strings arranger Ascher, the album's unsung hero – stepped up to the challenge. Perhaps more than any Lennon record, *Walls And Bridges* is an absolute pleasure (as opposed to a didactic mindfuck or a chilling revelation) to listen to. It's often been remarked that it exudes a strangely comforting déjà vu. We feel at home, relaxed, welcome. The beep-beep vocal hook from "Drive My Car" crops up on "Surprise, Surprise (Sweet Bird Of Paradox)", Lennon's sexy love song for May Pang. There are echoes of the 'White album' on "Old Dirt Road". The instrumental track "Beef Jerky" even lifts part of a guitar riff from McCartney's album *Band On The Run*. No offence was intended; Lennon simply liked the riff and nicked it.

His most musical album, and an absolute pleasure (rather than a mindfuck or chilling revelation) to listen to...

Lennon's personality on *Walls And Bridges* fluctuates between extreme highs and lows. He claims to be "*drowning in the sea of hatred*" early on, an image as alarming as anything on *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*, and some ruminations are morose to the point of morbidity ("*Nobody loves you when you're down and out... everybody loves you when you're six foot in the ground*").

But it's not a depressing album, and sometimes we find him flushed with joy, adoration and horniness. He gets away with the inconsistencies because he sings so well. Whether he's condemning the now-excommunicated Allen Klein ("Steel And Glass") or blowing a fond faraway kiss to Yoko ("Bless You"), the intensity of the moment brings out the best in him. He brutalises Klein ("*You leave your smell like an alley cat*"), but he woos Yoko like a gauche schoolboy ("*Now and forever our love will remain*"). From falsetto to roar, he uses all his vocal tricks to take us into his confidence.

On an album that was all about cutting ties with hedonism, it was ironic that the big hit single should be a party song. A high-energy duet with Elton John, which gave all sorts of winks and nods to pill-poppers and powder-snorters, "Whatever Gets You Thru The Night" was the 1974 equivalent of Robbie Williams' "Let Me Entertain You". It was irrepressible, insanely up-for-it, moderately annoying and totally ubiquitous. Elton, who dominated US pop radio at the time, knew a massive hit when he heard one. He proposed a wager. If the single reached No 1 (which Lennon was adamant it wouldn't), Lennon would appear onstage at an Elton show. For a man who had become exceptionally nervous about performing, it was a risky bet. "Whatever Gets You Thru The Night" topped the *Billboard* singles chart on November 16. That same week, *Walls And Bridges* overtook Carole King at the top of the album chart. Lennon had started the year in an alcohol fug; he was finishing it as rock's hottest property.

Despite a last-minute attack of nerves, he kept his side of the bargain and joined Elton onstage at Madison Square Garden on Thanksgiving Night (November 28). They performed three songs: "Whatever Gets You Thru The Night", "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds" (which was Elton's latest single) and "I Saw Her Standing There". Lennon, whose appearance was greeted with scenes of near-hysteria, introduced the last song as "one written by my fiancée". It was a night for surprises. Yoko, who had sent him a flower for luck, had secretly attended the concert in person, and met him backstage afterwards to his considerable shock. They talked and held hands, but a reunion did not look on the cards. Even the tender caress of "Bless You" – which reduced her to tears when she heard it – could not persuade Yoko to take him back just yet.

For all its poetry and beauty, *Walls And Bridges* has never been accepted as one of the classic Lennon albums. Denied a place at the top table, it waits in the CD racks, hoping for someone to take a chance. Curiously, it had a brief return to the spotlight in 1986, when the post-humous album *Menlove Ave* was compiled by Yoko. An assortment of studio sessions from 1973–4, it included five rehearsals for songs on *Walls And Bridges*. They weren't bad – just a shade too hesitant and sparse – and were clearly recorded before arranger Ascher worked his magic. One presumes it was Yoko's decision to position "Bless You" as the closer, ensuring that now and forever their love would remain.

YOKO ON... #9 DREAM

"It's beautiful, beautiful, and I really think that song particularly is a little bit more avant-garde than the others. Like, 'Whatever Gets You Thru The Night' is a like a real kinda rock'n'roll song and he wants to always go back to that in a way. A lot of kids now understand '#9 Dream' – '*This is a language that we understand.*'"

"Yoko and I, we had this little... thing": Lennon in Los Angeles during his 18-month "lost weekend"

'The more unsettled I am, the better I like it'

Another intimate meeting in New York, as RAY COLEMAN helps Lennon sequence *Walls And Bridges*, then ends up back at his and May Pang's place for an all-night binge of Chinese food and US TV. Amidst tales of Elton, black pudding and NYC punk, Lennon claims "I've got perspective now..."

MELODY MAKER
SEPTEMBER 14, 1974

IN THE RECORD PLANT studios in New York, John Lennon is putting the finishing touches to his next album. Reaching a track called "Scared", he suddenly decides there's something missing. "Sound effects! Let's get a creaking door! Or a dog barking. No – wolves howling. It'd sound great if we could kick it off with a lonely sort of cry from a wolf..."

A messenger leaves and within 15 minutes is back with two albums. From *The Chilling Thrilling Sounds Of The Haunted House*, John listens to the eerie creaking door, and decides that both this and the sound of thunder and lightning crashes are overstated. He moves on impatiently to the second album, *The Music And Language Of The Wolves*.

"Great, that's it. Put that at the start of 'Scared', then," he tells an engineer.

Three hours later, and we are listening to the playback of the track with the howling wolf thrown in. It's the first time John has heard the new album played right through. He's apprehensive, but the wolf gimmick has clearly knocked him out, and placed as it is at the start of the track, it's a winning move.

He smiles for he seems to realise that here is an album that will please even the cynics who bashed *Mind Games*. It's a beautiful production, completed in six weeks' studio work – "That's fast. I've been working at the speed of light" – and it's due out in America and Britain on September 16. The album is called *Walls And Bridges*. Why?

"Walls you walk into and bridges you can cross over. Deep stuff, huh?"

Three years after his self-imposed exile in the US, John Lennon is as unblemished a character as you'd expect to find in a man who has been through more personal changes than a mad chameleon. He's been through a severe de-Beatling process, to the point where now he can reflect on the past and he enjoys talking about the old days. Yet for all the mellowing of this erratic genius, there are still flashes of wry or scathing wit that will forever make him unmistakeable. Lennon has never provided questioners with a stock response.

He's 34 next month and rather aware of his age. Older, wiser, but with no real change of stance. His ideals are the same as they were, but he has learned more tolerance of people, if not of the system. And as it has been evident through the years, whatever it is that's needed to be a fully qualified rock'n'roller, then he has it. A tortured life and a brain like a waterfall, two rocky marriages, grit, a loud mouth, remorse after his drunken behaviour – it's surely all the very stuff rock stars are made of.

This has been a hard day for John. "Notice I've got me suit on? I've been to court this morning for another round in the ritual. [*His fight to get a Green Card, which will allow him free access to the United States.*]

"It's crazy, y'know. If they weren't making it so hard for me to stay here, I'd be off. They're just *making* me dig in and win. That's what I'm like, a young kid. If someone says you can't do something, I just want to do it. Probably as soon as they say I can stay, I'll go."

Lennon is being refused a Green Card because he was convicted of possessing drugs in Britain. But the great groundswell of American opinion is in favour of granting him permission to stay. The turbulence of a life like this, living in a country which officially says "Get out" has naturally worked well on Lennon's artistic sense. We walk outside Studio C while the engineers sort out his tapes, and John sits down to contemplate the day's court room show, and the press and TV cameras that met him on his exit.

"Funny thing, I almost enjoyed it. Just like the old days, cameras and questions and things. It's quite good for me – the more unsettled I am, the better I like it. When I feel settled down, there's nothing to say, can't write a word. I need to be on edge to work."

He's impressed with how well he's put his new album together.

"I got the musicians down here two days before recording for some run-throughs, and it made a colossal difference. Who's on it? Well, Elton John came in and sang on one and played piano on another. There's Jim Keltner, Klaus Voormann, Nicky Hopkins, Ken Ascher who produced Paul Williams and Jesse Ed Davis, on guitar. The percussion guy is Arthur Jenkins, and there's the horn section: Bobby Keys, Steve Madio, Howard Johnson and Frankie and Ronnie and the string section, and Harry Nilsson. He sings with me on 'Old Dirt Road'.

"Elton was great. I like CONTINUES OVER »

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

#9 Dreamer! John's fascination with the number nine stemmed from coincidental appearances of the number in his life: Lennon's birthday (as well as his son Sean's) being October 9, Brian Epstein discovered The Beatles on November 9, 1961, Lennon met Yoko on November 9, 1966...

TONY BARNARD/LOS ANGELES TIMES/GETTY IMAGES

him and what he does. He came in here on his way to [*Colorado studio*] Caribou and said he was going to do 'Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds' for his next single. Christ, he pours the stuff out. He's working now on his album that's coming out next May! I went down to LA and then to Caribou and sang on 'One Day At A Time'. It turned out so good that he said he might put that and 'Lucy...' out as a double A-side, but I can't see our track beating 'Lucy...'."

John is wearing a neat brown suit and his lapel bears a badge given to him by ace shopper Elton. It's a motif of an open sandwich with half an apple between bread slices, and Lennon is amused at the people who keep asking him for the hidden meaning.

"It's just Elton who found it and gave it to me. It's just nothing, but you know what they're like – people keep saying daft things like they always did like 'Do you own half of Apple, then?'"

We talk of the imminent Beatles fans' convention in New York, for which hundreds of people are going from all over the world to a two-day festival of talks and films and selling of Beatle bits and pieces at the Commodore Hotel. Do you regret being a Beatle and having to live with it forever, John?

"No, no, no," he answers and he means it. "I'm going to be an ex-Beatle for the rest of my life so I might as well enjoy it, and I'm just getting around to being able to stand back and see what happened. A couple of years ago I might have given everybody the impression I hate it all, but that was then. I was talking when I was straight out of therapy and I'd been mentally stripped bare and I just wanted to shoot my mouth off to clear it all away. Now it's different.

"When I slagged off the Beatle thing in the papers, it was like divorce pangs, and me being me it was blast this and fuck that, and it was just like the old days in the *Melody Maker*, you know, 'Lennon Blasts Hollies' on the back page. You know, I've always had a bit of a mouth and I've got to live up to it. *Daily Mirror*: 'Lennon beats up local DJ at Paul's 21st birthday party'. Then we had that fight Paul and me had through the *Melody Maker*, but it was a period I had to go through.

"Now, we've all got it out and it's cool. I can see The Beatles from a new point of view. Can't remember much of what happened, little bits here and there, but I've started taking an interest in what went on while I was in that fish tank. It must have been incredible! I'm into collecting memorabilia as well. Elton came in with these gifts, like stills from the *Yellow Submarine* drawings, and they're great. He gave me these four dolls. I thought, 'Christ, what's this, an ex-Beatle collecting Beatle dolls?' But why not? It's history, man, history!

"I went through a phase of hating all those years and having to smile when I didn't want to smile, but that was the life I chose and, now I'm out of it, it's great to look back on it, man. Great! I was thinking only recently – why haven't I ever considered the good times instead of moaning about what we had to go through? And Paul was here and we spent two or three nights together talking about the old days and it was cool, seeing what each other remembered from Hamburg and Liverpool.

"So y'see, all that happened when I blew my mouth off was that it was an abscess bursting, except that mine as usual burst in public.

"When we did a tour as The Beatles, we hated it and loved it. There were great nights and lousy nights. One of the things about therapy I went through a few years ago is that it cleans you by forcing you to get rid of the negatives in your head. It wasn't all that pie and cookies being a Beatle, there were highs and lows, but the trouble is people just wanted bigmouth Lennon to shout about the lows. So I made a quick trip to uncover the hidden stones of my mind, and a lot of the bats flew and some of them are going to have to stay. I've got perspective now, that's a fact."

"I'm going to be an ex-Beatle for the rest of my life, so I might as well enjoy it..."

TO SOME OF us who have enjoyed the irrational madness of a less balanced John Lennon, the new one might come as an unnerving experience. But our re-entry to Studio C proves that his music is intact and even richer from the years of turmoil.

"This is an unconcept album. I'll never make a concept album. I just like records," says John, and the engineer plays back a raunchy instrumental track called "Beef Jerky" which John named as a spoof on Booker T's "Green Onions". Half an hour passes and at last the record is ready for a complete play through, ready for John to decide on the order.

"This is always one of the hardest parts of it for me," John says. "Getting them in sequence for correct contrast is vital. "Like with you and the *Melody Maker* – if you don't put this article on the right page, like the front page, then it's all lost. Well, with these songs, they've got to be in the right order."

The album has on it: "#9 Dream"; "Beef Jerky"; "Scared" – with a great tune and these immortal words: "*You don't have to worry/In heaven or hell/Just dance to the music/You do it so well...*"; "Bless You"; "Surprise Surprise (Sweet Bird Of Paradox)" with Elton on vocal; "Nobody Loves You When You're Down And Out" (no relation to the Bessie Smith classic but equally spine-chilling, a majestic track); "Going Down On Love"; "Whatever Gets You Thru The Night"; "Steel And Glass"; "What You Got"; "Old Dirt Road" (with Harry Nilsson on vocals and as co-writer). Topping it off is a short burst of "Ya Ya", featuring John's 11-year-old son Julian on drums, Julian was visiting his father in New York and dropped by to lend a hand, and they chose this old Lee Dorsey track.

There's a beautiful, singing guitar break by Jesse Ed Davis on "Nobody Loves You..." and as the standout track it will close the album. Lennon listens intently to all the songs and we total the playing time to 42 minutes, 32 seconds.

"Great – I've only got just over two minutes to cut. No trouble. I was really worried that it would be too long, and I just like albums, not triples or double albums. One album is long enough for me to do what I can."

The engineers say the record is a beauty, John collects the tapes to go home and place them in order, and we are out into the hot New York night air at 9.30.

TAXI! WE'RE OFF to John's flat, and it strikes me as a bizarre contrast with the police-protected limousine rides we shared 10 years ago in various parts of the world, when Beatlemania ruled. Do you get cabs often in New York, John?

"Yeah, all the time. I used to get paranoid about going out, but then I found out all the paranoia was in my own head – nobody cares much. There's no hassles here in New York, I get 'em all the time. Not in California so much – they're still looking for stars there."

ZUMA PRESS, INC. / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

"I can see The Beatles from a new point of view": Lennon in Beverly Hills, 1973

One cabbie said to John: "Hey, aren't you John Lennon?" and Lennon replied: "I wish I had his money."

He looks around at the flickering city lights as our cab drives off, and tells what it is about aggressive New York that he finds so compelling. "It's all here. It's just alive. There's a buzz here, and I like the way you can do anything or get anything you want at any time. It's ALIVE, y'know? It's where the world's at just now and I want to be here. I mean years ago it was Rome, and if I'd been around then I'd have wanted to be there when it was falling.

"New York may well be falling right now, it sometimes feels like it, but I know it's the right place at this time. I think if I couldn't live here I'd have to make it Paris. I love the French, they're so bloody rude. But New York's right – we'll get home now and have the TV on and cable TV films for hours and hours. Better than the BBC Light Orchestra, eh?

"Oh, and Christ, then there was Watergate! Any country that produces that has got to be number one. I sat watching every bit of it on TV and couldn't believe it. When they kept asking a question and the guy kept replying: 'That is inoperative.' Everything they were asked that was meant to make 'em tell the truth, they said: 'That is inoperative.' I'm gonna try it when they start asking me hard questions. 'Sorry, but that's inoperative'."

John cherishes the fact that he had remembered this crucial line. "Yeah," he whispers, "I've gotta remember that! Inoperative!"

Just before we arrive at John's flat, he tells of his split with Yoko. "Yoko and I, we had this little... thing. She's still living in our house but I've moved into this flat. I still love her, but we're two artists and we found it hard living together. We'll see what happens. I still speak to her on the phone most days. She phoned me from London the other day and said, 'Hey, it's nice here. Remember the autumn with all the leaves? It's nice.' I said, 'What are you trying to say, Yoko? I know it's nice, but are you trying to unsettle me in New York? It's nice here – remember this noise?'"

Arrival at John's penthouse flat, to be greeted by white and black kittens, named Major and Minor. John's friend May Pang is there, and in yet another time-warp, the record playing is The Beatles singing "How Do You Do It?". They made it before "Love Me Do", John explains, but decided on "Love Me Do" as their first EMI single and gave "How Do You Do It?" as a song to Gerry & The Pacemakers. Sounds oddly primitive.

On the way up in the elevator, Lennon had warned me that he had a strange experience to relate. Being of sound mind and judgement, he had, the other day, seen a flying saucer while standing naked on his roof. "Yes, I know what you're thinking. I'm as crazy as my publicity always said I was. But no. Listen. This is true."

He then described how he was standing, starkers, by the window leading on to the roof when the oval-shaped object started flying from left to right. He had called May, who confirmed that he was not seeing things, and they saw a red light on top of the flying saucer. They rushed inside, phoned the cops, and the police said others had reported a sighting, too.

John and May got their telescope out, took pictures, and after about 20 minutes the object disappeared over the East River and behind the United Nations building, over which it might be supposed the "visitors" were carrying out some sort of research.

I didn't say much and Lennon threw his hands in despair. "They all think I'm potty. It was there. I didn't believe it either. It was THERE." May nodded.

"And you'd not been smoking or drinking?" I asked.

"No, God's honest truth. I only do that at weekends or when I see Harry Nilsson." [*Lennon added the following to the sleeve of Walls And Bridges: "On 23 August 1974, I saw a UFO – JL."*]

John is tired and hungry after a non-eating day in which he has been in court, held a press conference, and then completed his album. But he is still visibly "up" in mood and wants to do things, talk, play records, watch TV, eat. He changes out of his "court suit" into casuals and lays on the bed of the spartan, one-roomed flat.

Well, here comes the million-dollar question the world keeps asking. Are The Beatles ever going to reform, John?

"No," he says. "What for? We did it all. Christ, we can't even get the four of us together for a meeting, let alone play! The other month, Paul and Ringo and me met in LA and we wanted George there but they wouldn't let him in at that time. He still has trouble getting in and out of the States because of his bust years ago.

"So there were three of us and everybody says, 'Beatles getting back' hey, hey! We can't even MEET, man!"

Why had they wanted to meet?

"To settle all the money thing. We all agreed how to do it; now it's up to the lawyers to sort out and tell us whether what we agreed is practical. That's all. We just want to make sure we all get paid. What a fucking mess."

All four ex-Beatles, he says, were destined for a life of ups and downs in battles with authority.

"We're in, then we're out. It's my turn while I fight New York to be out. George will be OK soon – he's doing a tour of America [*with Ravi Shankar in the autumn*] and he'll be OK for a while. You know, people'll want his autograph and they'll smile at him and so it'll be OK. It goes like that for all of us. In waves. Y'know when some critics panned *Mind Games* they were really knocking *Some Time In New York City*, reviewing me and Yoko, who they've always hated. Well, *Mind Games* wasn't the best album in the world, but it went gold! And it wasn't all bad. Hey, I'm hungry. Let's get some food in."

Photographer Bob Gruen has arrived now, and a Chinese dinner is agreed upon. Bob phones a restaurant called Jade East, and within about half an hour, the splendid meal has arrived. Lennon, a true media freak, has applied himself to watching TV, and whizzes through the channels quickly all the time with the hand controls while he's lying on the bed and eating.

It's easy to see what it is about New York TV that John loves. It's all there: umpteen channels all pouring out good material, musically and otherwise. During the night, we flick from channel to channel and see act after act, including The Hues Corporation, The Temptations, The O'Jays, Flash Cadillac, whose old-fashioned rock theatrics make John laugh out loud (rare), and the act John keeps wanting to see, Chris Jagger.

"It must be awful," says John when Jagger Junior eventually hits the screen. "Living with being a Jagger for the rest of your life and trying to make it as an act. He's OK though." Chris's band and his playing are indeed good, though the mouth shape and postures demand comparison with Mick. "Must be awful," John keeps repeating.

"But he has the choice of changing his name if he didn't want to cash in on who he was," I say. "Like Mike McGear did."

"Ah," John counters, "but if he did that, he probably wouldn't get a booking in the first place."

Lennon is very anxious to see his TV appearance outside the courtroom, filmed earlier that day. Watching Lennon watch himself on TV is weird. As he lays on the bed munching Chinese beef and mixed veg, watching himself on TV coming out of court, he says: "Now that seems a sane young man to me. Should definitely be allowed in to stay in New York."

His TV news clip is really quite amusing and his performance rated five stars. Journalists ask him lots of questions:

"What are the odds are of you winning the fight to stay in New York, John?"

"Ninety-nine to one in favour."

"Why?"

"Because I'm overconfident, as usual."

"Why do you want to stay in New York?"

"Because it's NICE here, I LIKE it here. Don't you?"

"What's wrong with Britain, then?" asks a British reporter.

"Nothing's wrong with Britain – typically British question! If they gave me a Green Card, I can go and see it again, visit my family." (Earlier in the evening, there were signs that John CONTINUES OVER »

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

In November 1974, Lennon was the last Beatle to score a solo US No 1. "Whatever Gets You Thru The Night" trailed top spots for George ("My Sweet Lord", "Isn't It A Pity", "Give Me Peace..."), Paul ("Uncle Albert/Admiral Halsey", "My Love", "Band On The Run") and Ringo ("Photograph", "You're Sixteen")

With May Pang, delicately described by *MM* as John's "friend"

had become an enthusiastic father, showing me with affection a picture of his son Julian and recounting how he had taken him round New York, showing him the billboards.)

When the television clip is over, John amplifies on his need to get that Green Card from the US government.

"It's not the tax – you pay only a little less here then you do in Britain. If it was the money I'd move to Switzerland. I want to be able to move around. LA, Paris, London, New York – I like change. I'd like to go to South America, that's somewhere I've never been to. New York is now, that's because it's in the air. I've got nothing against England – no, make that Britain. I've heard it's in a bit of a mess now, but it was still pretty healthy when I left it, so don't let them come all that 'leaving the sinking ship' stuff. It was afloat when I left! Anyway, there's still great music coming out of Britain."

The TV newscast ends with John giving the two-fingered peace sign and saying: "Amnesty. Amnesty!" He came over well, and he seems quite happy about his performance. "First time I've seen myself on TV for three years." His lawyer, incidentally, believes that Lennon can stay in New York for two years fighting the deportation order.

"This is the first time I've seen myself on TV in three years. Is that what I look like? Christ, no wonder they wanna get rid of me"

WE TALK OF the Beatle fans' festival planned for New York, and the possibility of his attendance, or about sending a life-size dummy of himself. He intends to send a few things along as mementoes, and he wants May to go and buy him a few things too, as his collections of Beatles paraphernalia isn't as strong as he would like. Bootlegs, for example. Lennon has a few Beatles bootlegs, and though he sees them as a rough deal for the record business, he loves them as a fan. "Keeps the industry on its toes, I think. The one of The Beatles in Sweden, I think it was – it's better than some of the Beatles records in parts."

The two-day Beatles fans' convention, held to mark the 10th anniversary of their invasion of America, really fascinates John. Apple is sending two films never before seen in America, *Magical Mystery Tour* and *The Beatles At Shea Stadium*, The Beatles made for TV.

But as for as all four Beatles going to the Beatlefest – no. "Sometimes," says John, "I think it would be nice for us to do something like that, but when you can't even get all four of us together, for a meeting, what chance is there? It's like a hangover from the '60s: the Blue Meanies are still trying to beat up Sergeant Pepper. They don't seem to want us to be happy or together. The other draggy thing is that as soon as one or two of us meets, people say it's a Beatles reunion and they're all broke or something and they need the money and they say we hate each other!"

Lennon has been living in New York for three years, occasionally driving to Los Angeles and seeing, as he puts it, a hundred different countries en route.

"America is so different from state to state, I can't get bored," he continues. "I'd like to see China – all over the world, in fact, but all that's out and I can't leave here until I win the court case. So much to *do* here. I still haven't seen Elvis. I had tickets once, but I was on the wrong coast. Crazy. I'd like to see the Stones, Bowie and Elton – but I get nervous of going to these shows when I think of standing around backstages sprinkled with groupies and all the terrible hangers-on. The only time I'd willingly do a backstage number is if somebody I liked said he wanted me to be seen there to help him. I'd go through it for a friend."

That admission seems to typify the new-found softness of Lennon. During his wilder years, he'd hardly admit to having a friend, still less own up to caring for one.

On to his flickering TV then comes one David Peel, with whose group, the Lower East Side, Lennon had been linked on record and in person three years ago. Peel is an old-fashioned champion of the underground, and he is in blisteringly articulate mood as he spouts about how the underground should carry on in its campaign to overthrow the rock establishment and the music industry.

"The Beatles were and are pigs," Peel snorts.

"They took our money..." John mutters: "Well gimme mine." Peel's speech, full of hyperbole and sweeping, wild generalisations about the baddies of music's big business, is entertaining to Lennon, who says he's heard it all before and isn't it a shame that the personalities of the underground had always been their own biggest enemies?

On TV next come a group called Television, and Lennon sits fairly transfixed. Television are so bad they're good. They can barely play their instruments and they are very short of money; they're young and dressed in rags. But they have a spirit that's irresistible, and John immediately identifies them as a parallel with The Beatles in their Hamburg days. "Yeah, I can relate to them, they're exactly as we were. Skint and loving every minute. They sound terrible but they're OK!"

And then, obviously their tatty dress: "Hey, they've out-done Bowie! Bowie went crazy and they've gone the other way."

Er, no, John. It's just that they haven't any loot and they can't afford anything better! "Oh." He likes their name, too.

Photographer Bob Gruen, who takes *Melody Maker*'s New York pictures, and seems an ardent Lennonologist, shows John some colour snaps for John to choose for his new album sleeve. Lennon, whom we should recall as an art college enthusiast, is obsessive about pictures and TV and drawing, and he inspects the dozens of colour shots of his face carefully. "Christ is that what I look like? No wonder America's trying to get rid of me!"

May gets ginger beer from the kitchen, and it transpires that they had found a store which sold it, but only after a very long search. "It's not so good as English, but it'll do," says John.

And after years of having British friends flying into New York with a few black puddings, John has now found that these rare delicacies, too, can be bought in New York. "Any country outside England – sorry, Britain – that lets you buy black puddings has got to be a winner, right?"

"You shouldn't eat them," says May. "They make you fat."

"Hey, yeah, I've gotta watch that," says John.

"Yes," I say.

"Do you mind? That's all we need – a headline like 'Former Beatle Growing Fat'." OO

Keep fighting the power: Lennon's Green Card hearing is postponed, August 30, 1974

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES, BETTEMAN/ GETTY IMAGES

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ROCK'N'ROLL

In which John Lennon wrests the Lost Weekend tapes out of Phil Spector's grasp and sets about salvaging his covers project... BY JOHN ROBINSON

RELEASE DATE
21 FEBRUARY 1975

AS BEFITTED AN ALBUM conceived of in tremendous luxury, when the first tapes of John Lennon's *Rock'N'Roll* album finally arrived in New York City from Los Angeles in September 1974, they arrived in style. Rather than making their way from the airport in a U-Haul trailer, Laennon's tapes – the fruits of his increasingly deranged final collaboration with Phil Spector – arrived in a fashion more appropriate to the excessive nature of the enterprise: majestically, in four chauffeur-driven limousines.

If the scene sounds absurd, it was no more so than many that had characterised the "Lost Weekend", Lennon's 18-month vacation from adulthood. In that time, there had been epic boozing with Harry Nilsson, a ghostly haunting in JFK and Marilyn Monroe's former love nest, and public *frottage* in a cable car. Lennon had been observed trying to pull up a palm tree from someone's front yard. While in a drunken fury, he had been restrained by three men. He had been tied to a chair by two of Phil Spector's security team, and bitten by the versatile guitarist Jesse Ed Davis. Before it was over, he would be embroiled in a lengthy legal dispute with a reputed mobster.

How the tapes had got there to the Record Plant East was, in itself, also a story. Of course, in this chaotic period of Lennon's life, there was always a story. But what about the music?

There's a school of thought that maintains that if you can't remember what happened, you must have had a good time. As the engineers mounted the tapes, and Lennon reviewed the music, he was offered the opportunity to remember exactly what had happened at the Spector/Lennon *Rock'N'Roll* sessions nearly a year previously – before he had recorded and released another album, *Walls And Bridges*. Slurred vocal takes. False starts. And, of course, Spector's customary "Wall Of Sound" – the multi-channel microphone leakage that would make it nearly impossible to rescue the best parts of individual tracks.

It had certainly been some kind of party. Now sober, a couple of questions must have crossed Lennon's mind. What, exactly, had he been thinking? And what could he do to fix things?

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 | Be-Bop-A-Lula ★★★
2 | Stand By Me ★★★★
3 | Medley: Rip It Up/ Ready Teddy ★★
4 | You Can't Catch Me ★★★★
5 | Ain't That A Shame ★★
6 | Do You Wanna Dance? ★★★★
7 | Sweet Little Sixteen ★★
8 | Slippin' And Slidin' ★★
9 | Peggy Sue ★★
10 | Medley: Bring It On Home To Me /Send Me Some Lovin' ★★★
11 | Bony Moronie ★★★
12 | Ya Ya ★★
13 | Just Because ★★

2004 REISSUE BONUS TRACKS:

13 | Angel Baby ★★★
13 | To Know Her Is To Love Her ★★★
13 | Since My Baby Left Me ★★★
13 | Just Because (Reprise) ★★★

- **Released:** February 21, 1975
- **Produced by:** John Lennon and Phil Spector
- **Recorded:** A&M Studios, Los Angeles (October–December 1973); Record Plant, New York (October 21–25, 1974)
- **Personnel:** John Lennon; Jesse Ed Davis (guitar); Jim Calvert (guitar); Eddie Mottau (acoustic); José Feliciano (acoustic); Michael Hazelwood (acoustic); Steve Cropper (guitar); Klaus Voormann (bass, answer vocal on "Bring It On Home To Me"); Leon Russell (keyboards); Ken Ascher (keyboards); Jim Keltner (drums); Hal Blaine (drums); Gary Mallaber (drums); Arthur Jenkins (percussion); Nino Tempo (sax); Jeff Barry (horn); Barry Mann (horn); Bobby Keys (horn); Peter Jameson (horn); Joseph Temperley (horn); Dennis Morouse (horn); Frank Vicari (horn)
- **Highest chart position:** UK 6; US 6

JOHN
LENNON
ROCK'N'ROLL

JOHN
LENNON
ROCK 'N' ROLL
Side 1
BE-BOP-A-LULA
STAND BY ME
Medley:
RIP IT UP / READY TEDDY
YOU CAN'T CATCH ME
AIN'T THAT A SHAME
DO YOU WANT TO DANCE
SWEET LITTLE SIXTEEN
Side 2
SLIPPIN' AND SLIDIN'
PEGGY SUE
Medley:
BRING IT ON HOME TO ME / SEND ME SOME LOVIN'
BONY MORONIE
YA YA
JUST BECAUSE

Apple Records - All Rights of the Manufacturer and of the Owner of the Recorded Work Reserved.
ROCK 'N' ROLL
("An E.M.I. Recording")
33 1/3
Mfd. in U.K.
STEREO
PCS 7169
(YEX.943)
An Apple Record
℗ 1975 EMI Records Ltd.
SIDE 1
1. BE-BOP-A-LULA (Davis—Vincent) Carlin Mus. Corp. 2. STAND BY ME (King—Glick) Trio Mus. Ltd. 3. MEDLEY: (a) RIP IT UP (Blackwell—Marascalco) Macmelodies Ltd.; (b) READY TEDDY (Blackwell—Marascalco) Carlin Mus. Corp. 4. YOU CAN'T CATCH ME (Berry) Chappell & Co. Ltd. 5. AIN'T THAT A SHAME (Domino—Bartholomew) F. D. & H. Ltd. 6. DO YOU WANT TO DANCE (Freeman) Sherwin Mus. Ltd. 7. SWEET LITTLE SIXTEEN* (Berry) Jewel Mus. Ltd.
JOHN LENNON
Produced & Arranged by John Lennon
*Produced by Phil Spector, Arranged by John Lennon & Phil Spector
Unauthorised Public Performance, Broadcasting and Copying of this Record Prohibited

A billboard for Lennon's *Rock 'N' Roll*, Sunset Strip, LA, April 1975

WHATEVER IT BECAME (among other things, the only Lennon album to have been longer than a few weeks in the making; the reason for a long-running legal drama with a most unsavoury character; finally, after a very long time, an unlikely chart success), John Lennon's *Rock'N'Roll* was initiated with one aim in mind: simplicity. Wearied by the diminishing returns yielded by his *Some Time In New York City* and *Mind Games* albums, Lennon sought to absent responsibility for his own recordings, with a covers LP. By recording several compositions owned by Morris Levy, *Rock'N'Roll* would also allow him to clear a debt to the publisher, who had not sued him when Lennon used a line from Chuck Berry's "You Can't Catch Me" in The Beatles' "Come Together".

Rock'N'Roll was also, alongside Harry Nilsson's Lennon-produced *Pussy Cats*, to be the only substantial work to emerge from one of the most notorious episodes in his personal life: the boozy 18 months Lennon spent in Los Angeles with a woman not his wife. If a lack of responsibility was what he wanted in his music, that was what Lennon got in his personal business, too – even the decision to leave the marital home was taken for him. After troubled months in their relationship, Yoko Ono suggested that Lennon move out. Not only that, it was she who suggested that he take the pair's assistant, May Pang, with him.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

"Genuine rock'n'roll relived. Lennon simply accentuates the beauties that were always there – anyone else would have felt obliged to comment. I'm utterly disarmed and expect you'll be also..."
Ian MacDonald, NME, February 22, 1975

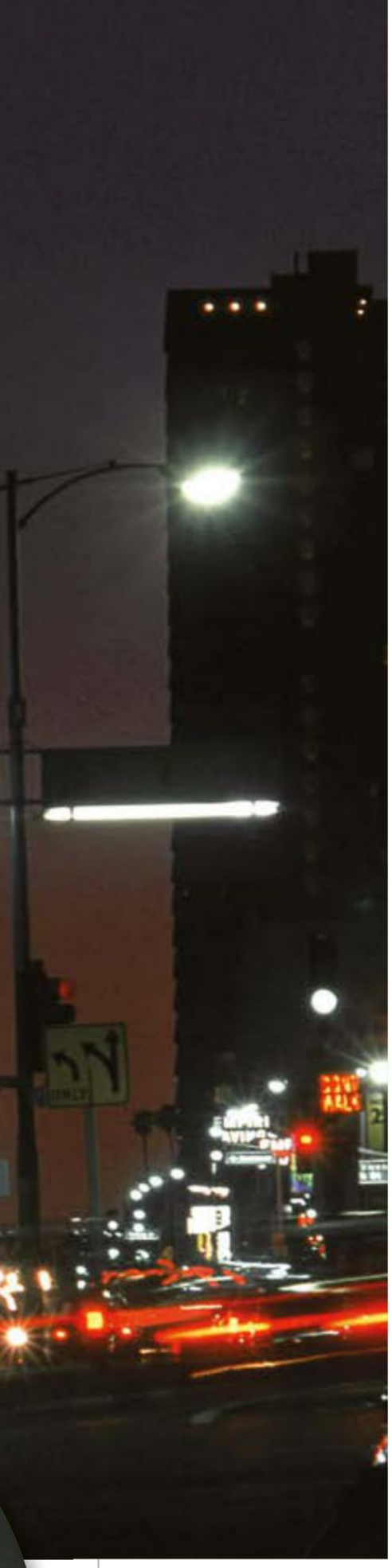
"Lennon was somehow fated to make this album. It was undoubtedly conceived in a spirit of fun, but it communicates little more than John's indulgence in his own trip..."
Michael Watts, Melody Maker, February 22, 1975

It's not entirely clear whether John Lennon's increased booze intake, and uncertain state of mind conspired to sabotage *Rock'N'Roll*, or whether the pressures and frustrations of working with Phil Spector on *Rock'N'Roll* served to fuel his booze intake and uncertain state of mind. Whichever, it has become impossible to hear one without recalling the other. As a transformative work, *Rock'N'Roll*, (in its original LP release, a collection of 13 cover versions of 1950s and 1960s pop hits) is in large part a failure, telling you not very much about Lennon and not much about his inspirations and the relationship between them, either. The image of a carousing Lennon run amok in this period, however, refuses to die, the legend far outweighing the material. To use banknotes from a different band's currency, the album is all Nellcôte and no "Tumbling Dice".

Instead, it has become a jumping-off point for anecdotes: Phil Spector in his butcher's apron; Lennon drunk on Brandy Alexanders at the Troubadour. The arguable lowpoint of these tales, as connoisseurs of Lennon Babylonia will know, finds Lennon, drunk, with a sanitary towel stuck to his head, berating a nightclub waitress for slow service. He is reputed to have asked her showbusiness's most obnoxious rhetorical question: "Don't you know who I am?"

As the nostalgic tracklisting of *Rock'N'Roll* suggests, Lennon seems to have been looking to his rock'n'roll past to help himself answer exactly that question. Leaning on rock'n'roll originals

DONALDSON COLLECTION/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



(the album opens with Gene Vincent's "Be Bop A Lula", and includes Chuck Berry's "You Can't Catch Me") and compositions by classic songwriting partnerships (Leiber & Stoller's "Stand By Me"), the selection can't help remind today's listener less of John Lennon, solo artist, than of the person he had spent the previous few years distancing himself from. Namely: John Lennon, Beatle.

Literally and metaphorically, *Rock'N'Roll* has The Beatles all over it. The album cover eventually featured a 1961 Jürgen Vollmer photograph of Lennon in Hamburg with the savage young pre-moptop Beatles. At the LA sessions, the band worked on several songs ("Be Bop A Lu La"; the adapted Phil Spector original "To Know Her Is To Love Her") that had been imported straight from Beatle sets at the Hamburg Star Club in 1962. In Los Angeles around this time, meanwhile, Lennon had Ringo within arm's reach, and even had Paul McCartney dropping by to jam, their rather half-hearted attempts at "Lucille" and "Stand By Me" caught on a bootleg whose title, *Toot And Snore*, neatly captures the mood of the moment.

Whatever impasse Lennon was in, however, it seemed it was by scrutinising the past that he hoped to move forwards – a sure enough indication that his thinking wasn't as lucid as it might have been. As a Beatle, he had seen the havoc that a "back to basics" approach had wrought during the recording of *Let It Be*. Now, he willingly signed up for it again.

To be fair to the author of this largely disastrous enterprise, in 1973, Lennon was far from alone in looking back to the golden years of rock'n'roll. Revival shows frequented by superannuated performers and drape-coated nostalgists played to packed houses. Glam rockers had amplified the rock'n' rollers' fashions, and were contorting some of their musical styles. On the Kings Road, in Lennon's abandoned London, young entrepreneurs Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood had opened a shop called Let It Rock. Even Ringo was in on the act, appearing alongside David Essex in the nostalgic rocker tale, *That'll Be The Day*. With its silver jubilee on the horizon, rock'n'roll, the original model, the insolent force, was approaching heritage status.

As recordings commenced at A&M Studios in October 1973 however, Lennon was not simply honouring music of the '50s and '60s – he was virtually method-acting a role as a performer of that era. With Phil Spector insisting on full control of the project, Lennon, previously the enjoyer of untold creative freedoms, had now effectively ceded control to both Spector and Levy before he had even played a note. Pseudonymously, Lennon was known as the rocker and troublemaker Dr Winston O' Boogie. Considering how his hands were tied on *Rock'N'Roll*, he may as well have called himself Johnny Gentle.

Not that Lennon doesn't fight to be heard on the recordings. Of the four songs from the original Spector sessions that survive on the album running order, Lennon is in spectacular voice on "You Can't Catch Me", while the crawling pace of "Bony Moronie" (the first tune attempted at the sessions, attended by an impressive roll-call of players from José Feliciano to Dr John) is enlivened by his commitment to the material, however lightweight. Interestingly, for all the aggravation that attended the recordings, the wooziness of the pace, and the oversupply of the world's best studio musicians, the Spector tracks are by far the best on the album at creating an atmosphere. Admittedly, that atmosphere is a long drinking session listening to the world's most expensive wedding band, but it's the authentically decadent sound of a mid-1970s Spector production. "Just Because" doesn't close the album in the traditional sense. Rather, it is asked to leave, and pours itself into a cab.

For all the debauchery that surrounded it, though, *Rock'N'Roll* isn't only (and perhaps in hindsight this is to the detriment of the album's character) the sound of a few drinks with 25 of the world's top session players. It's also a terrible hangover, and the firm resolution to never do anything so irresponsible again.

WHATEVER KIND OF rock'n'roll John Lennon eventually heard on the tapes retrieved from Spector by Capitol exec Al Coury, it wasn't the kind he wanted. Rather than the battle-hardened explosion of the Stu Sutcliffe-era Beatles, instead these were the bloated and boozy sounds of middle-aged men with a penchant for the good old days.

Having used the long hiatus enforced by the absence of the Spector tapes to make *Walls And Bridges*, now Lennon grasped the initiative. He took that album's core band – Jim Keltner on drums, Klaus Voormann on bass, Jesse Ed Davis on guitar, Ed Mottau on acoustic – and, after residential rehearsals at Morris Levy's upstate New York farm, set to work rescuing *Rock'N'Roll*.

As producer, Lennon ran a tight ship. The New York tracks recorded in late October 1974 ("Be Bop A Lula"; "Stand By Me", "Ready Teddy" and all) are brisk attempts at the material, but however they are sequenced on the final album, it's very difficult to disguise the fact that after 12 months, an expensive joke is beginning to wear very thin. Forced jollity and faithful rendition is the order of the day on these tracks: a swaying, reggaefied take on "Do You Wanna Dance?" recalls some of the atmosphere of the LA sessions, but elsewhere, there is little to suggest that we are in the presence of anything but the most efficient covers group, never mind of John Lennon. These recordings asked the impossible of their listeners: they asked them to turn the clock back, and forget what revolutions Lennon had helped initiate since.

When all was said and done, *Rock'N'Roll* ultimately cost Lennon a dent in his reputation, a lengthy legal action from Morris Levy, and more money than he had spent on *Mind Games* and *Walls And Bridges* put together. But for all that, probably the greatest tragedy of the album is that it's more enjoyable to talk and think about than it is to listen to. Certainly, the traditional complaints about the album are valid – that it's indulgent, that it's the kind of folly that only a rock star of Lennon's magnitude could get away with. But really, the album is in its way as revealing about his state of mind as his most explicitly confessional work. By absenting himself from all but the most basic creative input, Lennon paradoxically only drew attention to the one thing, for whatever reasons of creative incapacity and personal crisis, he was unable to contribute to the project: himself.

As such, *Rock'N'Roll* deserves, if not exactly another hearing, then at least a rethink. It's a good-time record, by someone who wasn't, in the end, having that much of a good time at all.

YOKO ON... "STAND BY ME"

"That was another prayer for him – 'Stand By Me'. I was not standing by him at the time, and I think that he loved that song and also he sings it so well... He wanted to lean on somebody as well and Phil [Spector] was such an incredible musician in his mind. Phil was an incredible producer and he is, he was, one of those legends, so he wanted to lean on this legend. But at the time I think Phil was [long pause]... very sensitive himself [laughing]. "He's such an incredibly talented guy, John, that even in his most drunken moment he cannot not be brilliant, and that shows. The fact that John is super-intelligent is the thing that always saved him from a situation and he was not just a drunk, he was a drunk who was thinking and knew exactly what he was doing."

Here is a good-time record, made by someone who wasn't having that much of a good time at all

Lennon's last live performance: filming the ATV special *Salute To Lew Grade*, April 18, 1975

'I've lost all that negativity about the past'

Rock'N'Roll is finally released, and Lennon celebrates by talking to 35 American DJs simultaneously, and then to CHRIS CHARLESWORTH. The full story, at last, of that album's tortuous gestation. Plus: homesickness, Bowie, Elton, George and two major reconciliations — with Yoko, and with his own history

MELODY MAKER
MARCH 8, 1975

UP ON THE 16th floor of the Capitol building, John Lennon is juggling with as many telephones as he can handle at one time. On the other end of these telephones are no less than 35 disc jockeys sitting at various radio stations throughout the length and breadth of the USA.

On one line, the promotion man from Capitol is roll-calling, and each jock answers as his name is called. John, in denim trousers and shirt and wearing those slightly sinister, tiny round dark glasses, grins absurdly at the other end of the room, smoking an endless stream of Gauloises and drinking coffee from a plastic cup.

Setting up a conference call with people in 35 different cities is no small deal, but then the artist we're dealing with is no small deal either. Capitol are anxious to sell plenty of copies of the new *Rock'N'Roll* album, and this method is as good as any to spread the word across the nation.

"Hello, John Lennon 'ere," says John, picking up an extension phone when the roll-call is completed satisfactorily.

Listening to answers without hearing the questions becomes a fascinating experience for the next 30 minutes, as John yells down the receiver in response to the nation's enquiries, which seem to cover everything from the new album to the imminent reformation of You Know Who.

"Why not?" he shrieks. (One assumes someone had asked him why he recorded an album of old rock'n'roll songs.) "It's something I've been wanting to do for years. In between takes on all sessions, Beatle days and since, we always messed around doing those sort of songs. We never put them out though."

Another silence. "Well, there was a psychodrama happening," he replies to this one. "It was called Phil Spector..."

Lennon began work on his *Rock'N'Roll* album in October of 1973, doing a number of sessions with Phil Spector at the Record Plant in Los Angeles. By all accounts, the sessions became pretty wild, with anything up to 28 musicians joining in on the tracks. When the work was finished, however, Spector disappeared amid stories of a nasty car crash. When he disappeared, he took the tapes with him, and it's taken John almost a year to get them back. Handing them over involved a deal whereby Spector received a very substantial producer's royalty.

At the time John did get hold of them, however, he was working on the *Walls And Bridges* album, so they were temporarily shelved. On playing them after the completion of this album, John decided that only four Spector tracks were worth using and the rest were too crazy. Then he went back into the studio, this time using the Record Plant in New York, and cut a further 10 tracks that he produced himself. The completed 14 make up the album, and asterisks on the rear of the sleeve denote which songs came from which sessions.

"We had a sacred English thing about rock'n'roll, but I've been playing 'Be-Bop-A-Lula' onstage since I was 15"

On the subject of the sleeve, incidentally, it's interesting to point out that the photograph on the front was taken in 1961 in Hamburg during The Beatles' Star Club days. This shot re-emerged at The Beatles Convention, held in New York last July, where the original photographer, a German named Jürgen Vollmer, was exhibiting a number of very early Beatles pictures. The three blurred figures in front of John are, from left to right, George Harrison, Stu Sutcliffe and Paul McCartney.

Trivia fans will also be interested to know that the royalties from John's version of "Peggy Sue" will go to McCartney, who bought the publishing rights to the Buddy Holly catalogue, and the royalties from "Bring It On Home To Me" will end up in Allen Klein's pocket. Klein owns the publishing.

"The project collapsed in LA," John is saying down the line to his 35 listeners. "Supposedly – you never know with Phil – he had a car accident, and I never got hold of the tapes. Out of about eight tapes, only four were worth using. I like 'Stand By Me', and 'Be-Bop-A-Lula' is one of my all-time favourites."

On he goes. "There's been more trouble with this album than Soft Mick," he says at one point, which shows that the Scouse in Lennon is still there despite three years away from home. He talks about the "other" album out on the market, a bootleg version of these same tapes that has been advertised on television [*Morris Levy's Roots set*], but doesn't say much because of legal reasons.

"My hair just happens to have grown down to my shoulders now. It's always the right length for the right time," he replies after another silence, and one wonders which town jock wanted to know how long John's hair had grown. "Let's say we're just good friends, ho ho," he says a little later, and no prizes for guessing the question this time. "At least we're talking and we're all happy with each other. If we got back together it wouldn't be for one last show, right? If we ever got together, my instincts tell me it would be more sensible to sit in a studio and get relaxed together and make some

CONTINUES OVER »

EVERETT COLLECTION INC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

music before stomping out on dates. I'm not saying that's in the offing, though."

Fifteen minutes later, with the US disc jockeys satisfied with their rap, John puts down the phone and relaxes before turning to me. He's always willing to talk to the English music press, perhaps feeling that because of his lengthy absence from Britain, *Melody Maker* merits special treatment.

"Well, I just finished *Mind Games* when I started the new album, and I just wanted to have some fun. It was so soon after *Mind Games* that I didn't have any new material. I wanted to just sing and not be the producer. I thought, 'Who's the one to do it with?' and immediately thought of Phil Spector.

"We went down to the Record Plant and started cutting and, well, it got pretty crazy, as you might have noticed from some of the reports in the papers. It really got wild at times. But we managed to cut seven or eight in the end before it collapsed, which is the only way to put it. Next thing, Phil had apparently had an auto accident. Only he knows whether he did or didn't, but that's what the story said.

"That was the end of it then, because he'd got the tapes and I didn't get them back until two days before I went into the studio to cut *Walls And Bridges*. After the Spector madness I went on to do the Harry Nilsson thing, and I pulled myself together in the middle of that and prepared for my own album. I tried everything to get them back, even just hanging around LA to see if Phil would get better. I couldn't think what to do, so I did the album with Harry while I was waiting. When I got the tapes, I couldn't get into them because I was all geared to *Walls And Bridges*.

"When I did get into them, I found that out of the eight there were only four or five that were worth using. The sessions, like, had 28 guys playing live and a lot of them out of tune, which is too much, even for rock'n'roll. So I didn't know whether to forget it or carry on, but I hate leaving stuff in the can. I thought about putting out an EP – remember them? – but they don't have them in America, and thought about a maxi-single. In the end I decided to finish it off and produce the rest myself. I did 10 tracks in three days in October, all the numbers that I hadn't got around to with Phil. I had a lot of fun and mixed it all down in about four or five days.

"My one problem was whether it'd sound weird going from the Spector sound to my sound, from 28 guys down to eight. But they match pretty well, I think. So there it was, I suddenly had an album. Then there was a complication with somebody in New York whom I'd given a tape to and he started advertising it on television, which we'd talked about at one point. Capitol and EMI heard it, though, and convinced me it should go out as a regular album. They have the right to do it and I couldn't stop them if they wanted to, but they convinced me it was the right thing to do.

"I've sent away for some of the other versions of the album but they haven't arrived yet. They've used my name on it and there's a court case going on. It's almost the same, with a couple of slight differences. It'll become a little collectors' item, I suppose, but it's nowhere near as good."

The idea of putting out an "oldies" album has been inside John for some time. "Every time I make an album, whether it was a Beatles album or one of my own, I jam on oldies to warm up. There must be tons of tapes around with me doing songs like this just to get the feel of being in the studio.

"We'd do these numbers to break the ice in case we were getting too uptight about a song. If it wasn't a 12-bar, it'd be something like 'Stand By Me', which everybody knew. With The Beatles, we covered a lot of rock'n'roll on the early albums, but we really were loath to do it on record because we always thought the originals were so great we couldn't touch them. We did them because they were our numbers onstage and we didn't have enough material of our own. We had no choice but to record 'Twist And Shout' and 'Dizzy' and all those things. We had a sacred English thing about rock'n'roll, but I've been playing 'Be-Bop-A-Lula' onstage since I was 15.

"Mostly they're my favourites, but 'Just Because' was one I hardly ever knew. Phil suggested that. 'Bony Moronie' was always a favourite, but there's a lot I've missed. I didn't make an attempt at early Presley. There was one of his I tried, but it was no good. I didn't touch early Jerry Lee, and there's plenty of his I used to do. I also used to sing all the early Buddy Holly stuff – in fact I *was* Buddy Holly for a period, what with the glasses, even though I didn't wear them onstage.

"There was a lot to go at, but there's 14 tracks on the album and most albums these days only have 10 tracks. I could have done more but I hate double albums. It's too much, especially for one guy singing."

I mention how McCartney would profit from the album..."What a clever move that was. I hope he gives me a good deal. Klein owns the Sam Cooke catalogue, too, which is 'Bring It On Home To Me'. I don't care who gets the money. With Paul it's cool 'cos we're pals, and even Klein's all right really. I'm not gonna get much money from this LP anyway."

Conversation turns to John's recent appearance onstage with Elton John, an evening which obviously delighted him in that the audience gave him a conquering hero's welcome as he stepped up to play.

"It was great. He was more nervous than I was, because he was nervous for me as well. Elton used to be in the Dick James office when The Beatles sent in their latest demo, so he had a real emotional feel for The Beatles. I went to see Elton at Boston and I was nervous just watching him. I was thinking, 'Thank God it isn't me' as he was getting dressed to go on. I went through my stagefright at Boston, so by the time I got to Madison Square I had a good time, and when I walked on they were all screaming and shouting. It was like Beatlemania. I was thinking, 'What *is* this!'

"It brought the roof down. It was déjà vu for me, not like The Beatles screaming bit, but the place was really rocking. We'd had a rehearsal but we weren't that together. By the time we got to 'I Saw Her Standing There', Elton's piano was jumping off the floor. It was his idea to do that. We had to do 'Whatever Gets You Thru The Night' because of a bet we had. Elton played piano on the single and said if it got to No 1, would I appear onstage with him?

"I never thought it'd make No 1, but it did and Elton said I hadn't to break my word. So naturally we did 'Whatever Gets You Thru The Night'. And naturally we did 'Lucy...' because I did that with him at Caribou. That's me out of tune in the background, doing the reggae bit. I got it wrong just like I did the original on *Pepper*...

"Elton wanted me to do 'Imagine', but I didn't want to come on like Dean Martin doing my classic hits. I wanted to have some fun and play rock'n'roll, and I didn't want to do more than three because it was Elton's show after all. He suggested 'I Saw Her Standing There' and I thought 'great', because I never sang the original of that. Paul sang it and I did the harmony."

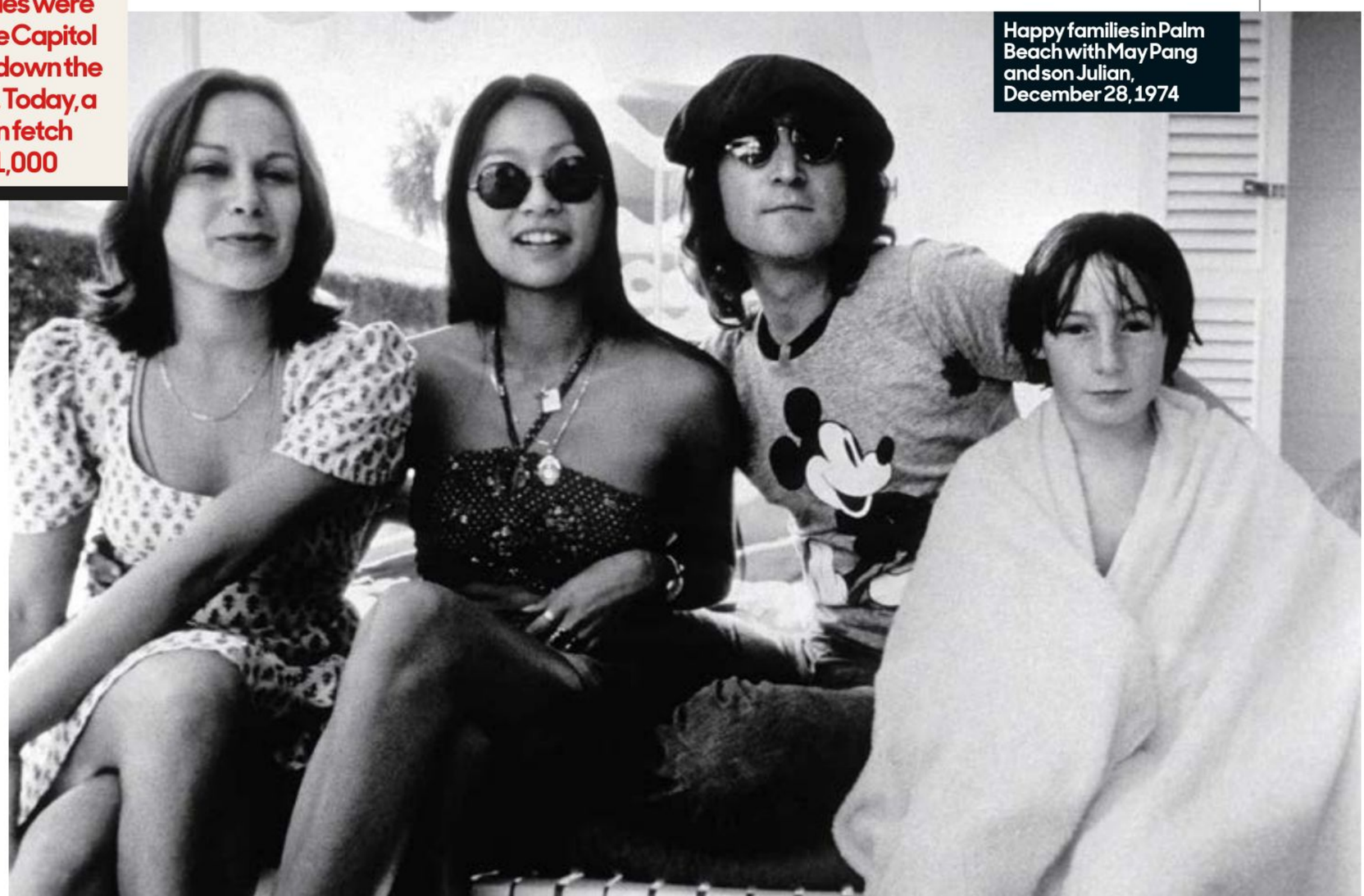
The experience, however, hasn't motivated John to go out on his own.

"I'm not against live performances, but I haven't got a group and I haven't put a stage show together. I'm just not keen on it right now, but I may change my mind. It'd be dead easy to go out and do this rock'n'roll material, but I'd have to do more. I'd have to do my old hits, which I wouldn't mind really."

John was expected to play at George Harrison's Madison Square Garden show but didn't because he had a row with Harrison over the signing of what he calls the "Famous Beatle Agreement" – the final dissolution of the group which required all four signatures. John was the last to sign the document.

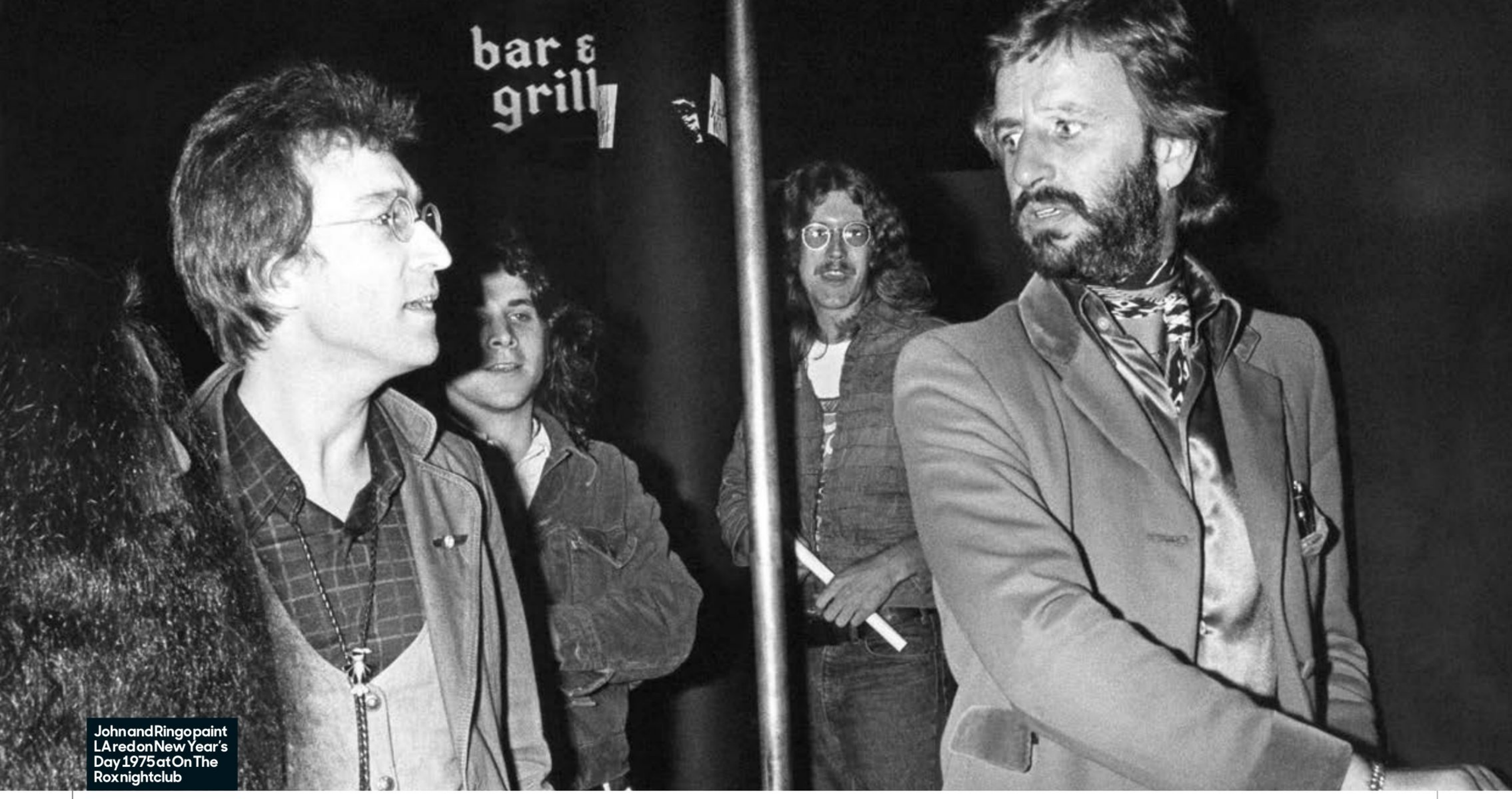
GIMME SOME TRUTH!

There's another *Rock'N'Roll*, of course. Released on Morris Levy's budget Adam VIII label, Roots – *John Lennon Sings The Rock'N'Roll Hits* looked pretty cheap, and was: $4.98 via mail order. 3,000 copies were sold before Capitol could shut down the operation. Today, a copy can fetch over $1,000



Happy families in Palm Beach with May Pang and son Julian, December 28, 1974

JOHN RODGERS/REDFERNS



John and Ringo paint LA red on New Year's Day 1975 at On The Rox nightclub

"I'm just glad Yoko let me back in again. It was like going out for a drink, but it took me a year to get it"

"George and I are still good pals and we always will be, but I was supposed to sign this thing on the day of his concert. He was pretty weird because he was in the middle of that tour, and we hadn't communicated for a while because he doesn't live here. I've seen Paul a bit because he comes to New York a lot, and I'm always seeing Ringo in Los Angeles.

"Anyway, I was a bit nervous about going onstage but I agreed to because it would have been mean of me not to go on with George after I'd gone on with Elton. I didn't sign the document on that day because my astrologer told me it wasn't the right day, tee hee. In the end I signed it in Disneyworld in Florida with my son Julian. I thought it suited the occasion.

"George was furious at the time because I hadn't signed it when I was supposed to, and somehow or other I was informed that I needn't bother going to George's show. I was quite relieved in the end because there wasn't time for rehearsal, and I didn't want it to be a case of John jumping up and playing a few chords.

"I went to see him at Nassau and it was a good tight show. The band was great but Ravi wasn't there, so I didn't see the bit where the crowd was supposed to get restless. George's voice was shot but the atmosphere was good and the crowd was great. I saw George after the Garden show and we were friends again. But he was surrounded by the madhouse that's called 'touring'."

Any bad publicity that George received hasn't affected John's attitude to live work.

"I respect George but I think he made a mistake on the tour. Mistakes are easier to spot if you're not the person making them, so I don't want to come on like 'I know better', 'cos I haven't done it. From what I read and heard, one of the basic mistakes seemed to be that the people wanted to hear old stuff. George wasn't prepared to do that, and I understand him. When I did that charity at Madison Square Garden, I was still riding high on 'Imagine' so I was OK for material. But when I did 'Come Together', the house came down, which gave me an indication of what people wanted to hear.

"At the time I was thinking that I didn't want to do all the Beatles shit, but now I feel differently. I've lost all that negativity about the past and I'd be happy as Larry to do 'Help'. I've just changed completely in two years. I'd do 'Hey Jude' and the whole damn show, and I think George will see that. If he doesn't, that's cool. That's the way he wants to be."

John is vague about his immigration situation, which of course is still pending.

"There are all sorts of things popping up and the whole thing is like a little teeny Watergate. I think things are looking up because the old guard have left. But it's still down to a political decision from the White House.

"There's a lotta people got into this country because there's been a special bill put through for them, and there's a chance that may happen with me. They do it for Pakistani maids and, for that matter, there're known Nazis living here who're not being harassed. It was on the TV a week ago that Nazis are here, including one who killed thousands of people in Poland. My lawyer has a list of people who've committed rape, murder and drugs-dealing – and they're hassling me.

"This is a last resort, but I'm gonna get that Green Card some day." [*He finally did, on July 27, 1976*].

John has recently been involved in sessions with David Bowie in New York. John met Bowie at an LA party he'd attended, he says, in the hope of seeing Liz Taylor. "Ringo knows her, so I went with him and Elton, but I really got to know him through Mick Jagger. I see a lot of Mick when he's in town.

"David told me he was going to do a version of 'Across The Universe' and I thought 'great' because I'd never done a good version of that song myself. It's one of my favourite songs, but I didn't like my version of it. So I went down and played rhythm on the track. Then he got this guitar lick, so me and him put this together in another song called 'Fame', which is on his next album too. I had fun and it'll be out soon."

He says he's missing England. He wants to see Aunt Mimi again and he misses his son Julian, although he was recently over for vacation.

"We went to Disneyland on what must have been the most crowded day of the year. It's funny. I was sitting on the monorail along with everyone else, not being recognised, and I heard someone with his back to me say that George Harrison was there today. The guy was leaning on me at the time, and he'd heard that a Beatle was there somewhere. He couldn't see the wood for the trees. It was like the 'which one of you is Ringo' bit that people used to say to us when we first started.

"I try not to miss England and I make myself not get sentimental about it. I'm gonna get this Green Card, and when I do I'll be on the next plane."

Lastly, John mentions that he's back with Yoko, after a separation that has lasted over a year. "I'm happy as Larry, and she is, I hope," he says. "We've known each other for nine years. I met her in 1966. We had a sort of breakdown last year, but we called each other often, even when I was going crazy out on the West Coast, and I probably said a lot of barmy things to her which I'll regret.

"I was just going over for a visit two weeks ago and it fell in place again. It was like I never left, although I'd been there a few times. Suddenly it fell back into place and I realised that this was where I belonged. I think we both knew we'd get back together sooner or later, even if it was five years, and that's why we never bothered with divorce.

"I'm just glad she let me back in again. It was like going out for a drink, but it took me a year to get it."

BRAD ELTERMAN/BUZZFOTO/FILMMAGIC

DOUBLE FANTASY

Loaves in the oven and familial love on his mind, a rejuvenated house-husband returns to music.

BY GRAEME THOMSON

RELEASE DATE
17 NOVEMBER 1980

IN THE MONTHS surrounding its release in November 1980, *Double Fantasy* was subjected to more fundamentally opposing shifts in perception than perhaps any other record in living memory. Lennon's first release since *Rock'N'Roll* in 1975, and his first album of new material since *Walls And Bridges* a year prior to that, understandably it was initially hyped as The Big Comeback, then swiftly derided as a self-indulgent, sentimental journey. "Let's waste no more time on John Lennon," wrote Charles Shaar Murray in his *NME* review. "On this showing he can get back to the kitchen and mind the kid and the cows." A couple of weeks and four gunshots later, *Double Fantasy* had become an extended elegy, a bestselling, chart-topping songbook of common prayer. Really, what chance did it have?

Every Lennon album comes laden with the baggage that, to various extents, each of the former Beatles lugged around with them. It's especially difficult, however, to extricate his final 'proper' album from the frame of its context, to free it from the chains of what had happened – or, more accurately, what hadn't happened – in the years before; more difficult still to remove the stain of the terrible events that unfolded almost immediately afterwards.

All this historical heft is arguably too great a weight to bear for an album on which most of Lennon's contributions are played with a straight bat, referencing nothing more substantial than '50s and '60s pop, rock and blues. These are simple, mature songs born from a newly simplified life. We all know the outlines of the fairytale: Lennon had spent the years since *Rock'N'Roll* getting off the "merry-go-round". He was rarely seen and almost never heard, spending his time in the Dakota Building, baking bread, boiling rice, raising his son, Sean, writing and watching the wheels go round and round. When his record deal with EMI lapsed in 1976 he hadn't bothered getting another one.

He was also allocating more and more time to travel – to Tokyo, to Cape Town –

CONTINUES OVER »

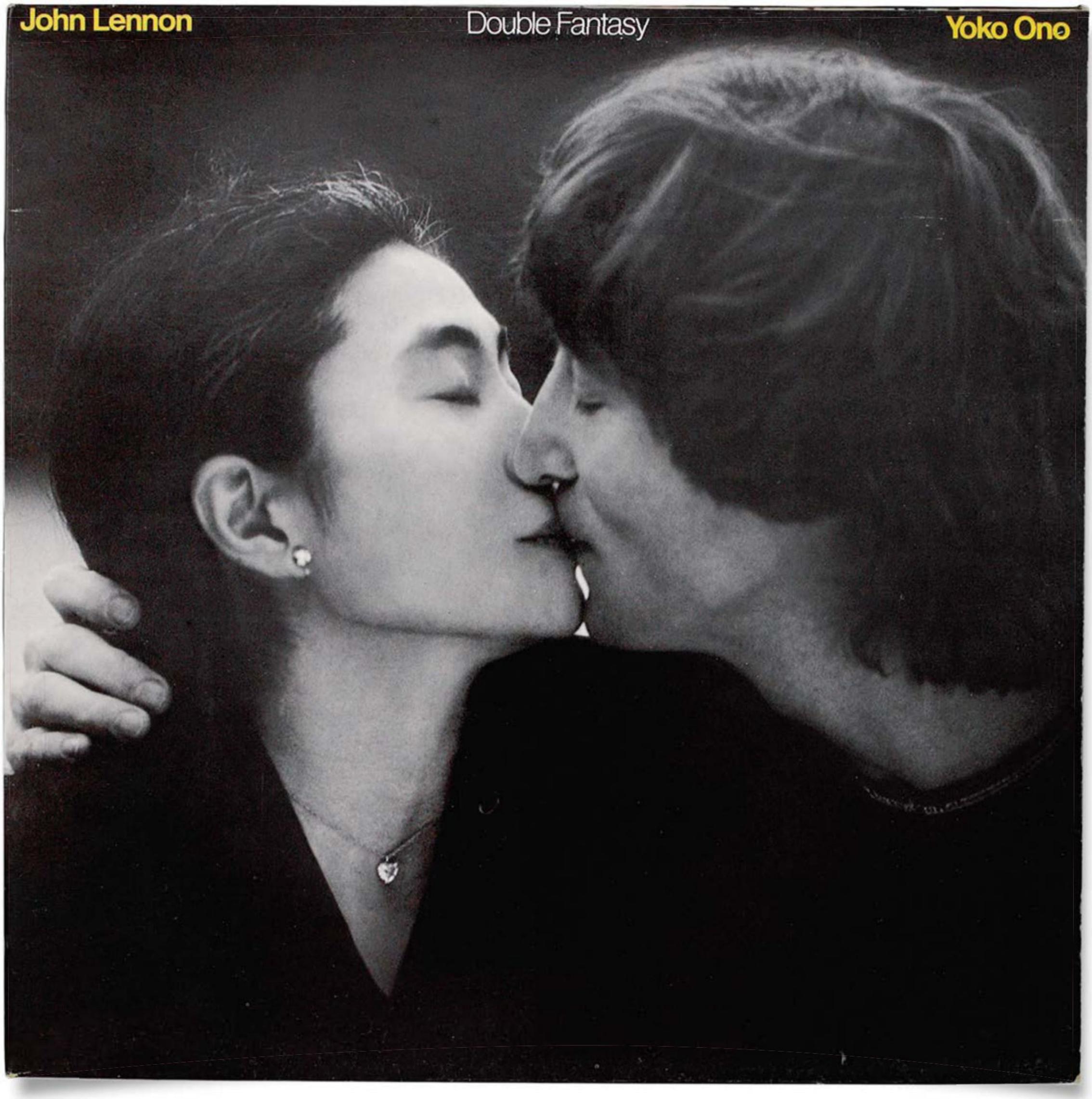
TRACKMARKS

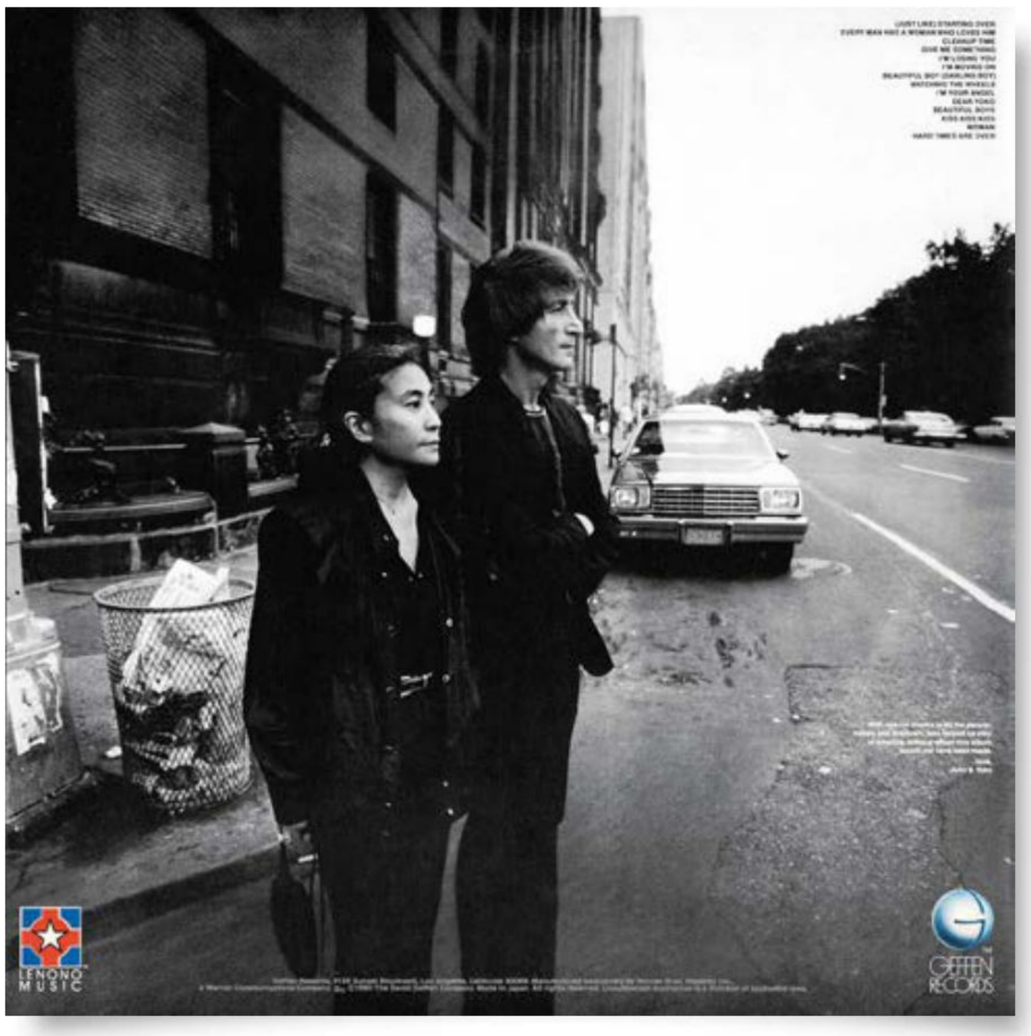
1 | (Just Like) Starting Over ★★★
2 | Kiss Kiss Kiss ★★★★
3 | Cleanup Time ★★★
4 | Give Me Something ★★
5 | I'm Losing You ★★★★
6 | I'm Moving On ★★★
7 | Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy) ★★★★★
8 | Watching The Wheels ★★★★
9 | Yes, I'm Your Angel ★★
10 | Woman ★★★★
11 | Beautiful Boys ★★★★
12 | Dear Yoko ★★
13 | Every Man Has A Woman Who Loves Him ★★★
14 | Hard Times Are Over ★★

2000 REISSUE BONUS TRACKS:

15 | Help Me To Help Myself ★★★★
16 | Walking On Thin Ice ★★★★★
17 | Central Park Stroll (Dialogue)

- **Released:** November 17, 1980
- **Produced by:** John Lennon, Yoko Ono and Jack Douglas
- **Recorded:** The Hit Factory, NYC (4 August 1980 – late September 1980)
- **Personnel:** John Lennon (lead, harmony and background vocals; rhythm and acoustic guitars; piano and keyboards); Yoko Ono (lead and background vocals); Earl Slick (lead guitar); Hugh McCracken (lead guitar); Tony Levin (bass); George Small (keyboards); Andy Newmark (drums); Arthur Jenkins (percussion); Ed Walsh (oberheim, synthesiser); Robert Greenidge (steel drum on "Beautiful Boy"); Matthew Cunningham (hammer dulcimer on "Watching The Wheels"); Randy Stein (English concertina); Howard Johnson (horns); Grant Hungerford (horns); John Parran (horns); Seldon Powell (horns); George "Young" Opalisky (horns); Roger Rosenberg (horns); David Tofani (horns); Ronald Tooley (horns); Michelle Simpson, Cassandra Wooten, Cheryl Mason Jacks, Eric Troyer, Benny Cummings Singers, The Kings Temple Choir (background vocals)
- **Highest chart position:** UK 1; US 1


John Lennon
Double Fantasy
Yoko Ono


LENONO MUSIC
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JOHN LENNON & YOKO ONO
LENONO MUSIC
DOUBLE FANTASY
SIDE 1
XGHS 2001
R
1. (JUST LIKE) STARTING OVER (John Lennon) -3:55
2. KISS KISS KISS (Yoko Ono) -2:41
3. CLEANUP TIME (John Lennon) -2:57
4. GIVE ME SOMETHING (Yoko Ono) -1:34
5. I'M LOSING YOU (John Lennon) -3:58
6. I'M MOVING ON (Yoko Ono) -2:19
7. BEAUTIFUL BOY (DARLING BOY) (John Lennon) -4:01
PRODUCED BY JOHN LENNON, YOKO ONO & JACK DOUGLAS
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"Just say what it is...": Lennon and Ono explain the new album's unfussy genesis to DJ Andy Peebles (with BBC colleague Doreen Davies) at The Hit Factory, New York City, December 6, 1980

MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD/REDFERNS

and it was on a sailing trip to Bermuda with Sean in June 1980 that inspiration finally returned. Once again he became "possessed" by a need to make music for its own sake, rather than as a contractual obligation.

The beginnings were suitably inauspicious. Lennon's songs on *Double Fantasy* were worked up at his rented villa in the Bermudan capital, Hamilton, and demoed using only a guitar, a drum machine and a couple of tape decks, which afforded him a primitive means of overdubbing and double tracking his voice. He had brought with him on cassette fragments of chords, melodies and lyrics stockpiled during his hiatus, and the songs came quickly. "I was so centred after the experience at sea that I was tuned in to the cosmos," he said. "And all these songs came."

In July he called home to Yoko in New York and asked her to set up a session at The Hit Factory with producer Jack Douglas. *Double Fantasy* was to be an exercise in smash-and-grab recording rather than a more considered return to the frontlines. Just a month after he'd started writing the songs, in early August Lennon began recording. The first single, "(Just Like) Starting Over", was in the shops by October. It wasn't quite "Instant Karma", but it was fast.

With a tight, sinewy studio band comprised of seasoned New York session men – Bowie's sidekick Earl Slick on guitar, Tony Levin on bass and Andy Newmark on drums, with Lennon handling rhythm guitar and most keys – he and Yoko recorded 22 tracks in 10 days: 14 made the final album, with most of the rest ending up on the posthumous release, *Milk And Honey* [*see p102*]. Taken as a collection, Lennon's contribution of seven songs reminds us that he was not only above all else a consummate popular musician (rather than countercultural icon, revolutionary, peacenik, or avant-garde composer), but a competitive so-and-so who had spent much of 1980 with one eye on the charts and the other on the output of Paul McCartney, whose chart success with "Coming Up" [*No 1 in the US, No 2 in the UK*] had tweaked his instincts.

This, clearly, wasn't the time for channelling Stockhausen and Janov. In retrospect, it would have been odd had he returned from half a decade playing house-husband with an album of mind-bending experimentation. *Double Fantasy* might open with the esoteric sound of a Tibetan wishing bell, but it soon lurches into the rollicking "(Just Like) Starting Over", a tongue-in-cheek canter through the early careers of Presley and Orbison. Throughout, there's something touching about the simplicity of the writing. In an interview with the BBC's Andy Peebles just after its release, Lennon scoffed at his past "Dylanesque" poetic flourishes ("'*I Am The Eggman*'? It could have been the pudding basin for all I cared!"), explaining that he now favoured a more artisanal approach: "Just say what it is, simple English, make it rhyme and put a backbeat on it."

He proved as good as his word. There are precious few acrobatics from Lennon on *Double Fantasy*, lyrically or musically. Subtitled 'A Heart Play', it provides an insight into nothing more contentious or far-reaching than the life of a 40-year-old husband and father. There are songs for his wife, his son, womankind in general, songs explaining his hurt, his joy – and his future. Those looking for a reappearance of the character who wrote "Power To The People" or "Revolution" would be sadly disappointed; the sole hint of an anthem comes in the singalong finale "Hard Times Are Over", which only goes to show that Lennon and Ono's concept of "hard times" differs somewhat from that of Stephen Foster or Ray Charles; the song could be subtitled "The Millionaires' Blues".

"Watching The Wheels" is by far Lennon's richest musical statement on the album. The piano intro echoes "Imagine", leading to an embarrassment of melodic hooks and a wry comment on his refusal to "*play the game*". Dispensing the odd clunky platitude ("*There's no problem, only solutions*") along the way, it shows Lennon the recidivist keeping his nerve amid the clamour from without, the constant questioning of his motives, his sanity, his health. It also has a strikingly beautiful chorus with a very Beatlesesque descending synth string figure. The good-natured disco shuffle of "Clean Up Time"

YOKO ON... "(JUST LIKE) STARTING OVER"

"'Starting Over' is right. We were going to do some incredible musical trip afterwards, it was opening into something beautiful and we were going, 'Right on', you know, and it was just cut off."

explores a similar theme of retreat and renewal, Ono counting out the money while *"the king is in the kitchen, making bread and honey"*.

Ono isn't so much his muse any longer as simply his canvas. Typically, he bounces between child-like declarations of everlasting devotion and songs of abasement and abject apology. At its worst, this seam gives us nonsense like "Dear Yoko", a prime example of Lennon's penchant for favouring the message over the content. Little more than a scratchy riff and a Buddy Holly impersonation, it sounds like it was written and recorded while the bread was rising.

"Woman", on the other hand, cuts deeper, reaching out not just to Ono, but also to his mother, to Aunt Mimi, to all womankind as the ultimate creator. If it teeters on sentimentality, we can forgive it from a man who in the past was no stranger to furious misogyny. There are more Beatles touches in the music: the ascending melody line contains sly echoes of McCartney's "Here, There And Everywhere" from *Revolver*, the backing vocals wink towards *Rubber Soul*'s "Girl", and the lyrical depiction of a universal female spirit floating in the sky cannot help but recall the 'White Album''s "Julia".

"I'm Losing You" is even better, an emotional heavyweight which details the cracks in the domestic idyll. The howling paranoia on display is classic Lennon. The failure to get through on the phone from Bermuda to Yoko in New York leads to a kind of accelerated crisis of faith, in which everything rapidly collapses around his ears. Childhood abandonment issues and previous betrayals are depicted as wounds that can only be stemmed, never quite healed. It's almost comforting to know that, beneath the family-man exterior, Lennon's vulnerability remains so raw and accessible.

Built on crunchy, bluesy sevenths and wracked minor chords (it was originally recorded with Cheap Trick, then re-recorded with the studio band), "I'm Losing You" is the better behaved older brother of "Yer Blues". Elsewhere on the album Lennon's vocals sometimes sound ring-rusty, a bit thin and apologetic, but here his voice – particularly when he spits *"what the hell am I supposed to DO?"* – has all the desperate edge of old.

The recurring theme of Lennon's solo work is the dialogue between him and Yoko Ono, and *Double Fantasy* takes the conversation to its logical conclusion. Ono was well aware that if she and Lennon were each allocated one side of the album, nobody would ever turn the record over. So what we got (in the days before skipping songs on CD and iPod shuffle) is the tongue-and-groove effect of alternate tracks; it works surprisingly well, particularly on "I'm Moving On" – her acid response to "I'm Losing You" – and "Beautiful Boys".

You need to give Ono's songs a fair hearing to really appreciate this album, because most of them act as emotional – if not musical – counterpoints to what comes before and after. They also provide a welcome reminder that this album was recorded in 1980 rather than 1970. While Lennon was retrieving the atavistic feelings of pure, simple joy he experienced when he first started writing songs in the 1950s, Ono was attuned to what had been happening on their doorstep, in CBGBs and Studio 54. Oddly and rather poignantly, given the premise of the album and the content of many of the songs, artistically they'd never sounded so far apart.

"Kiss Kiss Kiss" is edgy post-punk, somewhere between Talking Heads and The B-52s, the orgasmic climax like Donna Summer's "Love To Love You Baby" recut for the soundtrack of Nagisha Oshima's *In The Realm Of The Senses*. On "Every Man Has A Woman Who Loves Him", Ono captures the chilly groove of Blondie's "Heart Of Glass" and "Atomic". "Walking On Thin Ice", completed the night that Lennon was murdered and included on the 2000 reissue, might just be the best song from the entire sessions.

By contrast, Lennon's "Help Me To Help Myself", the other unreleased song included on the 2000 reissue, is wonderfully primitive. A home recording of a gospel-style piano ballad, it's another song in which the lyrical content (*"Well I tried so hard to stay alive..."*) gains added layers of emotional intensity with the knowledge of what was soon to come.

In the end, there's no escape. The shadow of Mark Chapman looms over this album. In light of Lennon's murder on December 8, 1980, *Double Fantasy* seems loaded with portents, omens, codes and shadows. Every optimistic line or cheery whoop appears cruelly ironic – not least the title to "(Just Like) Starting Over" – and every dark thought sounds horribly prophetic. No track is more contaminated than "Beautiful Boy", that unguarded lullaby for Sean, floating on a liquid Oriental melody that brings to mind the easy fluidity of "#9 Dream". Here, the weight of hindsight is heavy indeed: *"It's getting better and better"*, Lennon sings to his five-year-old son, adding: *"I can hardly wait to see you come of age"*. The track contains Lennon's last great lyrical epigram: *"Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans."*

You need an open mind and an open heart to savour *Double Fantasy*. It has several great songs, many beautiful melodies, and it probably speaks to more people than "Cold Turkey" ever will. But it will always suffer from the unhappy accident of being Lennon's last completed work. No sooner had he re-entered the fray than he was gone again, and so the question of whether *Double Fantasy* was a gateway to great new things, a metaphorical clearing of the throat before a sustained rebirth, or simply the start of the road to ruin could never be answered. The result is an album that will forever hover somewhere between a full stop and a question mark.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

"*Double Fantasy* is right: a fantasy made for two... it sounds like a great life, but it makes a lousy record..."
Charles Shaar Murray, NME, November 22, 1980

"Packed with musical clichés and lame sentiments, it's a depressing end to a disappointing re-emergence... This album fails because the music can't do justice to its treacherous subject"
Ian Pye, Melody Maker, November 22, 1980

***Double Fantasy* will always suffer from the unhappy accident of being Lennon's last completed work...**

Starting over: John and Yoko pose outside The Hit Factory, September 18, 1980

R. MCELROY/GETTY IMAGES

MILK AND HONEY

Yoko dusts down the sometimes fraught, often poignant last recordings of rock's self-styled Barrett and Browning. BY NEIL SPENCER

RELEASE DATE
27 JANUARY 1984

AFTER THE HORROR outside the Dakota, after the hasty cremation, after the prayer vigils and the wave of anguish and loss that swept the globe, what then for Yoko Ono? At first, she retreated into the shrouded world of the widow, isolated in fortress Dakota, although pungent rumours trailed, as ever, behind her (could she really be tight with another man, her 'assistant' Sam Havadtoy?). Personal grief aside, there was much to occupy Ono; she was the sole inheritor of a tangled business and artistic empire, and the de facto custodian of Lennon's legacy.

There was also her own music to consider and work on, an activity that she later said kept her sane during the aftermath of John's death. In the liner notes to *Milk And Honey*, Yoko describes the period between 1981 and 1983 "As though Sean and I were standing in a snowfield surrounded by human wolves, who claimed themselves 'close friends' and meanwhile raped and desecrated John's body in front of our eyes."

It was thus three years before Yoko had finished the album that Lennon had boasted, just before his death, was virtually complete.

He was, as so often, exaggerating – the *Double Fantasy* sessions had yielded 22 finished songs, of which 14 had been used – but John Lennon was on a roll. In the last year of his life, the muse had returned forcefully to the ex-Beatle, delivering way too many songs for a single album, let alone one he was sharing with Yoko. It was, said John, "a diarrhoea of creativity". In the run-up to the release of *Double Fantasy* and with a world tour scheduled for spring 1981, the pair were already planning the follow-up, which like *Double Fantasy* would be a 'Heart Play', a dialogue between two lovers. They already had the title, *Milk And Honey*, as in 'days of milk and honey', a time of ease and contentment. The phrase was also Big Apple argot for a couple of white and Asian origin.

To emphasise that this was a companion piece to *Double Fantasy*, *Milk And Honey* CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1	I'm Stepping Out	★★★★
2	Sleepless Night	★★
3	I Don't Want To Face It	★★★
4	Don't Be Scared	★★
5	Nobody Told Me	★★★
6	O'Sanity	★★★
7	Borrowed Time	★★★★
8	Your Hands	★★★
9	(Forgive Me) My Little Flower Princess	★★
10	Let Me Count The Ways	★★★★
11	Grow Old With Me	★★★
12	You're The One	★★★★

2001 REISSUE BONUS TRACKS

13	Every Man Has A Woman Who Loves Him	★★★
14	I'm Stepping out (Home Version)	★★★★
15	I'm Moving On (Home Version)	★★★
16	Interview With John And Yoko	

- **Released:** January 27, 1984
- **Produced by:** John Lennon and Yoko Ono
- **Recorded:** August–late 1980, 1983
- **Highest chart position:** UK 3; US 11

John Lennon
Milk and Honey
Yoko Ono

Polydor
MILK AND HONEY
A Heart Play
JOHN LENNON AND YOKO ONO
1
MADE IN ENGLAND
POLH 5
(617 160-1)
STEREO
33
1. I'M STEPPING OUT 2. SLEEPLESS NIGHT 3. I DON'T WANNA FACE IT 4. DON'T BE SCARED 5. NOBODY TOLD ME 6. O'SANITY
All words and music by John Lennon and Yoko Ono
Original Sound Recording made by Polygram Records, Inc.(New York)
1.-6. Ono Music/Warner Bros. M.Ltd.
℗ 1984 POLYGRAM RECORDS, INC.(NEW YORK)
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came in a near-identical cover shot of John and Yoko kissing, this time in colour. Yet the album the couple had intended to make was no longer possible. Some of Lennon's extant songs were mere demos. Others that were completed had little relevance to what was meant to be another paean to the magical partnership between the roughneck Liverpool rocker and his aristocratic 'Little Flower Princess'. Now that *Milk And Honey* would become an epitaph to her marriage, Yoko felt she had to write a batch of new material for it.

As a result, *Milk And Honey*, released shortly before Yoko's 51st birthday, walked a delicate line between honouring John's last recorded songs and Yoko's desire to say goodbye to her man. It did so with more aplomb than Yoko's numerous critics had imagined – for many listeners, this was a fresher, more enjoyable record than its predecessor, as well as one containing moments of almost unbearable poignancy.

Conspicuously absent from the album's credits was the name of producer Jack Douglas, who had helmed *Double Fantasy* and several of the Lennon tracks on *Milk And Honey*. Douglas' relationship with Yoko had soured to the point where he had taken legal action in pursuit of unpaid royalties, the case being settled out of court, leaving John and Yoko as the album's listed producers.

If the record was meant to be 'a conversation between a man and a woman' as John put it, the opener, "I'm Stepping Out", can only be the defiant aftermath of an argument. Several biographers have the song written after John had defied Ono's disapproval of him hanging out with old music cronies, though like many songs that came to fruition in 1980, it seems to have existed in embryonic form for months or even years before taking final shape during John's stay in Bermuda. It's a simple enough boogie, buoyed along by an inflection of reggae, which would prove to be one of the surprise ingredients of *Milk And Honey*. Lyrically, it's straightahead, too, anticipating a night on the town now that Sean's in bed and the cats are fed. It's time for John to *"put on my space suit"* and get the heck out the house, a metaphor perhaps, for his re-emergence to musical action.

Yoko's response is "Sleepless Nights", a sexually restless piece of disco reggae with her pining for *"three-minute love"*, up to solo shenanigans in the bath: *"This brush must sell like crazy,"* she ponders. *"I mean there's a lots of lonely people out there."*

Lennon's "I Don't Want To Face It" has nothing to do with love. It's a piece of almost despairing self-laceration, where Lennon confronts his own shadow. *"You want to save humanity, it's just people you can't stand,"* he admonishes himself before admitting that *"Every time I look in the mirror I don't see nobody there"*, a line that had cropped up on home demos for several songs over the last year or two. Clearly, it resonated.

"I Don't Want To Face It" presented something very different from the image of the contented house-husband assiduously cultivated by John and Yoko, and far closer to that of a man who'd spent the last years of his life flickering between self-doubt, depression and a nagging need for self-assertion. Here he sounds elated, hitting high notes that resonate all the way back to the moptop days of "She Loves You".

Again, Yoko replies with a sideways step into cod reggae, "Don't Be Scared", accompanied by farting early-'80s synths – cutting-edge at the time, but nowadays quaintly antique. It's a slender song, likeable enough, but hardly a response to the issues of identity and personal politics touched on by John's song. More apt is Yoko's "O'Sanity", where she is likewise at the end of her tether, seemingly unable to let go of her control, her sanity. *"Drink up, shoot up, anything you please,"* she pleads with the 'devil' that's always at her back.

For many, this was a fresher record than its predecessor, as well as containing moments of unbearable poignancy

The contrast between Yoko's half-pace synth reggae and John's guitar-heavy rock-out on "Nobody Told Me", a distant cousin to the Fabs' "Eight Days A Week", is sharp. Again, the sentiments of the song are directed at himself rather than his relationship with Yoko. The lyric owes something to The Shirelles' doo-wop "Mama Said", a track known to Lennon from Cavern Club days, in which the girls attest *"Mama said there'd be days like this"*. John (Mama-less of course) had no such luck; he's in a state of mock bewilderment at the hurly burly of city life, with *"Nazis in the bathroom"* and *"a UFO over New York"* (Lennon believed he'd spotted one over the South River in the mid-'70s and, according to his then-girlfriend May Pang, leapt up and shouted, "Come back and get me").

It's a rollicking song that became a substantial hit as the lead single for *Milk And Honey*. The line *"There's a little yellow idol to the north of Katmandu"* was lifted from a celebrated 1911 monologue by the English actor J Milton Hayes, one that would have been familiar to Lennon from his schooldays listening to *The Goon Show* on the radio, where the piece was much parodied.

Lennon wrote the song for Ringo, who had courted all three old Beatle buddies for tunes for his new album, *Stop And Smell The Roses*. John, never able to turn down a request from the least problematic of his old gang, penned "Nobody Told Me" and "Life Begins At Forty". Ringo, scheduled to record both numbers in January 1981, understandably turned aside.

There's no missing the irony of a number called "Borrowed Time" being recorded a couple of months prior to John's death, but far from being a song of foreboding, this is another of those 'Lennon remembers' moments, looking back to his younger days when he was *"living the illusion of freedom and power"*. Now, by contrast, it's *"good to be older"* with *"everything clear"*. Again it's reggae, and of a sophisticated stripe. While in Bermuda, The Wailers' *Burnin'* album had become a Lennon favourite – one evening, listening to (Bunny Wailer's) "Hallelujah Time", with its refrain *"We gotta keep on living, living on borrowed time"*, John took inspiration; the results came quickly, easily. Later, when recording it in New York, he took along the Wailers' album to school the band.

At the heart of *Milk And Honey* are a pair of cassette-demo tracks inspired by the English poets Robert Browning and his wife, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The Ono-Lennons had become fascinated by the Victorian couple, who eloped after a secret courtship. "We thought maybe we were the reincarnation of Robert and Liz," wrote Yoko in the album's liner notes in a probably ill-advised revelation. She had woken up one morning in the summer of 1980 "with 'Let Me Count The Ways' ringing in my head", its title taken from a poem by Elizabeth. After recording it and playing it down the phone to John in Bermuda, he had responded with "Grow Old With Me", based on a poem by Robert – a mutual exchange of vows.

Yoko's song is her finest contribution here, a disarmingly simple melody over which images of clouds and dawns dance, concluding in the triple *"thankyou thankyou thankyou"* that had become a mantra of praise for John and Yoko when things went well.

With its hymn-like chorus of *"God bless our love"*, John imagined his own song being pumped out at church weddings. For *Milk And Honey*, he planned to record it with horns and strings, an intention that would be realised in 1998 when George Martin overdubbed an orchestral arrangement, a gig the three surviving Beatles had declined in 1994, preferring "Free As A Bird" as their tribute.

YOKO ON... "NOBODY TOLD ME"

"I think that especially around that time he felt that again, the world had lost its course, its direction. I really think that it's to do with, not confusion, but starting to learn that life is always gonna be a mystery... It's a kind of fun song."

November 2, 1980: the first time in five years that Lennon had been photographed professionally and the last comprehensive photo shoot of his life

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

"A sad epitaph... merely the crumbs of a Lennon revival. But crumbs are all you're getting, so make the most of them." *Colin Irwin, Melody Maker, January 28, 1984*

"The arterial blood of *Milk And Honey* is Yoko Ono's... For Lennon, further irony prevails. On "Borrowed Time", he suggest he's living on it, but little else can recommend an ordinary song..." *Penny Reel, NME, January 28, 1984*

Lennon's demo version here is spectral, as if floating through the ether from the 1850s, and its sentiments chime heart-rendingly. Biographer Robert Rosen, one of the few to have set eyes on Lennon's journals, alleges that Browning's lines *"Grow old with me/The best is yet to be"* were written on the very last page of John's diary.

John had recorded "(Forgive Me) My Little Flower Princess" during the *Double Fantasy* sessions, intending to return to improve something he thought "sounded too Philly [*soul*]". The song's plea for forgiveness from Yoko belongs more properly to *Double Fantasy*; amid the more cavalier moods here its sentiments seem mawkish, abject, even when enlivened by a funky backing.

The accusation that *Double Fantasy* and *Milk And Honey* were spinning out the myth of John'n'Yoko is not without substance – we now know that their marriage was not the idyll they presented to the world. But the couple's intention was as much to reinvigorate their partnership through music, an attempt to cast a healing spell.

With John gone, Yoko can only reflect on what's been lost. "Your Hands" is simple remembrance of their intimacy, sung and declaimed in English and Japanese over a somewhat stiff, shimmering backing. More successful is the closing "You're The One", where the distress of loss and a defiant celebration of love both play a part. Musically it owes something to "Walking On Thin Ice", which John (its producer) had exultantly declared was "the direction to go in". Over a loping disco rhythm and a wash of synths (less clumsily employed than elsewhere) Yoko assures the departed John that she's with him for eternity, though she wonders *"How can I tell you?"*.

There's self-knowledge here, too; the world saw John and Yoko as clowns, she says, as Laurel and Hardy, while they thought of themselves as Heathcliff and Cathy. *"In reality we were just a boy and girl who never looked back,"* she concludes in a moment of pathos. Yoko's halting vocals are choked-up, only fleetingly bursting into something like the trademark wail of the old days. The scratchy fade lets you know that this is one wound that will never heal.

Reissued in 2001, three tracks were added: a reprise of *Double Fantasy*'s "Every Man Has A Woman Who Loves Him", this time sung by John; a demo of "Stepping Out", presumably from Bermuda, and a demo of Yoko's "I'm Moving On", with its barbs at John – *"You're getting phoney"*. They're added value, but little more. A 20-minute edit of the inteview the pair gave, hours before tragedy struck, finds John "full of vim and vigour" as he puts it. "I'm not trying to compete with my old self or the New Wave kids. I'm trying to enjoy it. We feel this is just the start."

JACK MITCHELL/GETTY IMAGES

JOHN LENNON ANTHOLOGY

A mammoth trawl through the archives: demos, outtakes, drunken rows with Spector, Dylan impressions, Cheap Trick and *"hairy arseholes"*.

BY NEIL SPENCER

RELEASE DATE
2 NOVEMBER 1998

"WE'RE ROLLING. SOMEBODY count in and let's go!"

John Lennon's snapped instructions to the three members of Cheap Trick assembled at New York's Hit Factory in autumn 1980 to record "I'm Losing You" show a man in a hurry. So does almost every studio track on *Anthology*, a compilation of 94 outtakes, demos, live performances and spoken-word tidbits chosen by Yoko Ono. Its four CDs provide an account of Lennon's solo years that parallels, amplifies and occasionally contradicts the story told by Lennon's official releases.

The Cheap Trick-assisted "I'm Losing You", for example, reveals a gnarly sound closer to the squalling anger of "Cold Turkey" than the romantic moods of *Double Fantasy*. Indeed, one conclusion to be drawn from *Anthology* is that Lennon's recordings were frequently over-produced, with their melodies and rock muscle smothered in orchestral sauce, or their vocals unnecessarily double-tracked or dropped deep into the mix.

This was a habit Lennon, as self-producer, seems to have caught from Phil Spector (never forgiven by McCartney for the syrup he poured over The Beatles' *Let It Be*), though Rob Stevens, the man charged with overseeing *Anthology*, offered a simpler and more startling explanation – that Lennon didn't much care for the sound of his own voice.

Stevens brought other insights into Lennon's way of working; that he rarely cut more material than was necessary for the LP he had in mind, and that once he entered the studio the pace he set was fast and relentless. It's something clearly apparent in the studio banter on *Anthology*, with Lennon no sooner having finished one take than he wants to 'go again'.

The exception to the rule was the messy *Rock'N'Roll* sessions overseen by Phil Spector. Otherwise, the solo Lennon regarded the studio as the business end of life as a rock superstar. In The Beatles' mid-'60s heyday, the group created their masterpieces via extended stays at Abbey Road and the lines between composing, recording and tripping happily blurred. In his solo years, Lennon afforded himself no such luxury. Once he'd written songs, he wanted them dispatched with a minimum of fuss.

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

CD1 – ASCOT

1	Working Class Hero	★★★★★
2	God	★★★★
3	I Found Out	★★★★
4	Hold On	★★★
5	Isolation	★★★
6	Love	★★★
7	Mother	★★★★★
8	Remember	★★★
9	Imagine (take 1)	★★★
10	"Fortunately"	★★
11	Baby Please Don't Go	★★
12	Oh My Love	★★★
13	Jealous Guy	★★★★
14	Maggie Mae	★★★★
15	How Do You Sleep	★★★★
16	God Save Oz	★★★
17	Do The Oz	★★
18	I Don't Want To Be A Soldier	★★★
19	Give Peace A Chance	★★★★
20	Look At Me	★★★
21	Long Lost John	★★★★

CD2 – NEW YORK

1	New York City	★★★
2	Attica State (live)	★★★
3	Imagine (live)	★★★
4	Bring On The Lucie	★★★
5	Woman Is The Nigger Of The World	★★
6	Geraldo Rivera – One To One Concert	★★★
7	Woman Is The Nigger Of The World (live)	★★
8	It's So Hard (live)	★★★
9	Come Together (live)	★★★★
10	Happy Xmas	★★★
11	Luck Of The Irish (live)	★★★
12	John Sinclair (live)	★★★
13	The David Frost Show	★★
14	Mind Games (I Promise)	★★★
15	Mind Games (Make Love Not War)	★★★
16	One Day At A Time	★★★
17	I Know	★★★
18	I'm The Greatest	★★★★
19	Goodnight Vienna	★★★★
20	Jerry Lewis Telethon	★
21	"A Kiss Is Just A Kiss"	★★★
22	Real Love	★★★
23	You Are Here	★★★★

JOHN LENNON™
anthology
he tried to face reality
JOHN LENNON
anthology
he tried to face reality
DAKOTACD4
THELOSTWEEKENDCD3
BOOK

A laidback Lennon in 1970: "Instant Karma's gonna get you"

PENNY TWEEDIE/CORBIS/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

ANTHOLOGY INCLUDES GREAT unreleased songs, fascinating demos, some touching, intimate moments with Yoko and son Sean, but Lennon the studio animal is at its heart. As Lennon was disinclined to discard any particular take of a song – even if he'd goofed his vocals, the instrumental part might prove to be the best – there were always multiple outtakes. When Yoko first asked for Lennon's studio output to be digitally transferred and archived in the late 1980s, some 2,000 hours of tapes were unearthed at New York's Record Plant – this was in addition to material held by EMI in England from Plastic Ono Band sessions, and the demo tapes and sound library held by Ono.

The Herculean task of cataloguing this output fell to producer and engineer Rob Stevens, who'd worked on previous Ono projects. Once Stevens had simmered down the material to 50 or so hours, Yoko began the process of selection. By this time – the mid-1990s – the posthumous Lennon story had evolved. Back in 1988 Ono had handed a batch of Lennon's home demos to the US radio corporation Westwood One, whose mammoth series, *The Lost Lennon Tapes*, became a source for bootlegs and, much later, YouTube clips.

The Beatles Anthology had also arrived in autumn 1995, heralded by those symbolic acts of reunion, "Free As A Bird" and "Real Love", where the 'Threetles' upgraded Lennon home recordings given to Paul McCartney by Ono at Lennon's 1994 induction into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame.

The commercial success of *The Beatles Anthology* gave fresh impetus to a Lennon counterpart that, when it arrived, proved the more interesting, coherent and elegantly packaged scrapbook. By comparison to The Beatles' much told tale, John's solo years, at least their second half, were a mixture of rumour and secrecy. The myth of Saint John, zealously promoted by Yoko, had been mauled by Albert Goldman's scabrous 1988 biography, *The Lives Of John Lennon*, which painted Lennon not as a contented house husband but as a depressed, doped recluse, his idyllic marriage an elaborate sham. Goldman drew Yoko even more savagely, as covetous of her husband's artistic gifts, driven by money and in thrall to her paid psychics.

Anthology can be seen in part as Yoko's attempt to restore John's slipped halo and reclaim her own integrity. The tone of her liner notes, where she relates the emotional strain of revisiting the past, is wounded and defiant. "This is the John I knew... brilliant, happy, angry, sad."

Ono divided the collection chronologically – into 'Ascot', 'New York City', 'The Lost Weekend' and 'Dakota'. 'Ascot' offers alternative versions of the *Plastic Ono Band* and *Imagine* sessions, all less polished but in some instances – "Working Class Hero", "Mother" – more biting (the latter is on the *Nowhere Boy* soundtrack). "Hold On" is delivered, ineffectively, as a mid-tempo blues. "Remember" has John cracking up with laughter at the speed Ringo is driving it, while to limber up between takes, the Plastic Ono Band knocked out standards like "Baby Please Don't Go" and a skifflesque "Long Lost John" that John had doubtless played with The Quarrymen. The past and its songs are never far away; rock oldies, music hall ditties, Beatles songs and 1950s ballads flit in and out of Lennon's repartee.

We're shown "Imagine" starting studio life with a harmonium that highlights its hymn-like qualities – a cop from the organ part on Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade Of Pale" according to Antony De Curtis' liner notes, though the Mellotron of "Strawberry Fields" seems a more likely inspiration. A string-free "How Do You Sleep" is a treat, with George Harrison's dobro guitar parts vying with Lennon's venomous vocals, and "Jealous Guy" also comes unadorned.

'New York City' is less arresting. The 1972

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

"Pleasures are found throughout the set, but most intriguing are the views into Lennon's darker side... Even when confused, crude or frankly hateful, Lennon was magnetic. There's simply no-one around in popular music today with his degree of presence. More than a mere personal memorial, *John Lennon Anthology* is a monument to a bygone era of larger artists and higher ambitions."

Ian MacDonald, Uncut, December 1998

performances at Madison Square Garden come from a different show to those on *Live In New York City*, with a version of "Come Together" where John sings the *"He got hairy arseholes"* line of which he was so proud. "John Sinclair", "Attica State" and "The Luck Of The Irish" from benefit gigs at the Apollo and Ann Arbor do little to set the pulse racing, and television snips of David Frost and Jerry Lewis gushing over their celebrity guests seem there for the benefit of Yoko's ego rather than for the listener.

There is more fun to be had from the two songs Lennon wrote and recorded for Ringo in 1974. "Goodnight Vienna", which would provide Ringo with the title track of his album, is a tumbling boogie with a throwaway lyric, but "I'm The Greatest" reveals how Lennon's life as a Beatle still preyed upon him. *"I was in the greatest show on earth... for what it was worth,"* he sings in a way that suggests it wasn't worth much. *"Now all I wanna do is boogaloo,"* he assures us. It's a moment of light-heartedness, but the strained demo of "Mind Games" indicates ennui had already set in during 1973. A string-free "You Are Here" is more affecting than the released track from *Mind Games*, with Lennon, now separated from Yoko, pining forlornly.

And so to 'The Lost Weekend'. None of the anecdotes about the drunken *Rock'N'Roll* sessions with Spector prepare you, though, for the ugliness of the studio exchanges. Spector, revelling in his authority, barks at his musicians and interrupts Lennon as he counts himself in. "Phil, please accept my '4'," pleads John, desperate even in his inebriation. "We have a chance here, let's not fuck it." Then he's off on a tangent about his new friend, Elton John, predicting with grim inaccuracy that "Elton's gonna die young, I'm gonna be a 90-year-old guru."

How John's heart must have sunk when he listened back, months later, to the glutinous mess he and Spector made of "Be My Baby". To a ponderous, overweight backing, John yowls as if having a 'primal', but no amount of anguish can save a track that's an advert for sobriety. The other *Rock'N'Roll* outtakes here are from the New York sessions, pleasant but lightweight. The *Walls And Bridges* cuts, by contrast, all benefit from the low-key production – the bereftness of "Nobody Loves You When You're Down And Out" is completely tangible.

The real meat of *Anthology*, and its happiest surprises, arrive on 'Dakota', which has outtakes from the *Double Fantasy* sessions and snatches of John at work alone in the Dakota and in Bermuda. Any of the outtakes can pass muster compared to the released versions – "I'm Losing You", as noted, exceeds its album equivalent – while the demos here all sound animated, and, as producer Jack Douglas told *Uncut* in 2005, "My immediate impressions were that I was going to have a hard time making it better than the demos, because there was so much intimacy in the demos."

The cumulative effect of hearing the *Double Fantasy* songs unplugged back to back with the studio versions is to sense the euphoria that was coursing through Lennon in 1980, a joy that his creative gifts had returned, that he and Yoko could work together in partnership and that his time as a devoted father was paying off. Sean was approaching five years old, when the rewards of parenthood grow substantially as childhood supplants infancy. "Mr Hyde's Gone (Don't Be Afraid)" is a charming companion piece to "Beautiful Boy", and unravels at the end into Lennon larking his way through a 1920s "moon/June/spoon" routine. This is not the sound of a depressed man. Nor is "Dear John", a fragment scratched out on guitar where he tells himself: *"Don't be so hard on yourself... you've won!"*

The real meat of *Anthology* arrives on "Dakota", with outtakes from *Double Fantasy* and snatches of John at work alone in the Dakota and in Bermuda. Any of the outtakes pass muster with the released versions

In her liner notes, Yoko writes that, "The intrigues surrounding us were getting thicker as we stepped into 1980... There was an acute sense that time was accelerating and that we were caught in a spiral that was moving at the speed of light. It was the happiest and therefore the most tragic period of our lives."

Even the comedic "Life Begins At 40" bears that out. Written for Ringo in honour of both Beatles reaching 40, it's a country song whose melody is lifted from Hank Williams' "Cold Cold Heart". If life begins at 40, gags Lennon, *"I've been dead for 39"*. Another track for Ringo – a version of The Platters' "Only You" from 1974, intended as a vocal guide – was a late inclusion here, being discovered in the basement of Capitol studios days before *Anthology* was pressed.

Nothing speaks louder of the return of Lennon's muse, though, than "Serve Yourself". Written in Bermuda, it's on one level a furious response to Dylan's "Gotta Serve Somebody" [*from 1979's Slow Train Coming*] and his conversion to Christianity. *"You gotta serve yourself,"* scoffs Lennon, *"nobody's gonna do it for you"*. The song, which he cut in several versions, moves onto a denunciation of religion as a motive for war (*"God and country"*) before taking off into an expletive-loaded rant about honouring *"your poor bloody mother"*, all delivered in a phlegm-thick Scouse accent that hadn't been heard since *Abbey Road*'s "Polythene Pam". Lennon was so taken with "Serve Yourself" that he considered issuing it as his next single.

Dylan is also the subject of a pair of spoken-word satires that speak of idle hours in the Dakota when Lennon had nothing better to do than read out the newspaper in a preposterous Dylan accent. Also here is "The Great Wok", a chuckling spoof on the Maharishi that demonstrates Lennon's penchant for accents. Elsewhere he recalls his Indian sojourn with relish in "The Rishi Kesh Song" (the nostalgic "India" remains unissued).

Understandably, Yoko can't help piling on the pathos for *Anthology*'s closing scenes. A tender exchange with Sean, telling him he'd come from the sky, delivered in an apple box, is followed by John strumming and whistling a wistful air in the style of "Jealous Guy".

TRACKMARKS CONTINUED...

CD3 – THE LOST WEEKEND

1 | What You Got ★★★
2 | Nobody Loves You When You're Down And Out ★★★★★
3 | Whatever Gets You Through The Night (Home) ★★★
4 | Whatever Gets You Through The Night (Studio) ★★★
5 | Yesterday (Parody) ★★★
6 | Be Bop A Lula ★★★
7 | Rip It Up/Ready Teddy ★★★
8 | Scared ★★★
9 | Steel And Glass ★★★
10 | Surprise Surprise (Sweet Bird Of Paradox) ★★★
11 | Bless You ★★★★
12 | Going Down On Love ★★★
13 | Move Over Ms L ★★
14 | Ain't She Sweet ★★
15 | Slippin' And Slidin' ★★★
16 | Peggy Sue ★★★
17 | Bring It On Home To Me ★★★
18 | Phil And John 1 ★★★★
19 | Phil And John 2 ★★★★
20 | Phil And John 3 ★★★★
21 | "When In Doubt, Fuck It" ★★★
22 | Be My Baby ★★★
23 | Stranger's Room ★★★
24 | Old Dirt Road ★★★

CD4 – DAKOTA

1 | I'm Losing You ★★★★★
2 | Sean's "Little Help" ★★
3 | Serve Yourself ★★★★★
4 | My Life ★★★
5 | Nobody Told Me ★★★★
6 | Life Begins At 40 ★★★
7 | I Don't Wanna Face It ★★★★
8 | Woman ★★★
9 | Dear Yoko ★★
10 | Watching The Wheels ★★★
11 | I'm Stepping Out ★★★★
12 | Borrowed Time ★★★★
13 | The Rishi Kesh Song ★★★
14 | Sean's "Loud" ★★
15 | Beautiful Boy ★★★
16 | Mr Hyde's Gone ★★★★
17 | Only You ★★★
18 | Grow Old With Me ★★★
19 | Dear John ★★★
20 | The Great Wok ★★★
21 | Mucho Mungo ★★★
22 | Satire 1 ★★★
23 | Satire 2 ★★★
24 | Satire 3 ★★★
25 | Sean's "In The Sky" ★★★★
26 | It's Real ★★★★

- **Released:** November 2, 1998
- **Produced by:** Yoko Ono and Rob Stevens
- **Recorded:** June 1969 – late 1980
- **Highest chart position:** UK 99; US 64

'It was just a man and a woman getting together'

UNCUT
SEPTEMBER 2003

Yoko Ono guides CAROL CLERK through an extraordinarily detailed account of her time with John Lennon. From acid and the avant-garde, bed-ins, heroin, the end of The Beatles and the Lost Weekend through to their last tranquil years together — Yoko tells all

SUSAN WOOD/GETTY IMAGES

» UNCUT SEPTEMBER 2003

IT'S THE SUMMER of 1969, and John and Yoko are in bed in Room 1742 at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, Montreal. They are in their "Year of Peace", this is their second and most famous bed-in, and an abusive visitor has confronted them. Right-wing cartoonist Al Capp is apparently trying to goad John into some act of violence that will undermine the couple's reputation as peace campaigners, frequently addressing Yoko as Madame Nhu – the widely reviled "Dragon Lady Of South Vietnam".

The smirking Capp insults the Lennons' efforts to quell the riots erupting at a continuing demonstration in People's Park, San Francisco, by protesters wanting to save the land from development by Berkeley University. With one person so far shot dead, many injured and thousands arrested, John and Yoko have been talking to the participants by phone and live radio every day, urging calm.

"They started throwing rocks at cops just a couple of days ago," sneers Capp. "You'd better talk to them a little more."

"Well, no-one got shot this time, did they?" retorts John.

But Capp persists: "You people have a home in London. Are you permitting people to come in and defecate on the rugs, smash the furniture and beat you up?"

"We don't agree with violence in that form or any other form," raps Lennon.

"Why do you want them to do it at Berkeley?" continues Capp.

John's eyes focus angrily on his detractor. He starts shouting. "We don't want them to do it at Berkeley! We are telling them to protest some other way! If they'd stayed in bed at Berkeley, they wouldn't have got killed!"

Yoko attempts a conversation with Capp: "I'd like to ask you what you said about Joan Baez..."

He cuts her dead with a patronising chuckle and remarks to John: "I can see why you want peace... God knows, you can't have very much, from my own observation, but anyway..."

By this time, John would clearly love to knock him out, but instead endures another flurry of insults before an outraged Derek Taylor, The Beatles' publicist, asks Capp to leave the room. John intercedes on his behalf, mellowing, chuckling that, "We asked him here."

CONTINUES OVER »

John and Yoko: unpredictable, inseparable, crusading, controversial, confrontational, naïve, spontaneous, optimistic, well-meaning, misunderstood – and, to some people, downright annoying.

But not to Toronto rabbi Abraham Feinberg, a vocal supporter of their peace effort. He declares: "The love that the two of them have for each other extends itself to all humanity. It really does."

SOME 34 YEARS later, Yoko Ono is sitting in a hotel suite on the edge of the Grand Canal in Venice, sipping chilled water and telling *Uncut* about that love; about being half of the most famous couple in rock history. Why has their snapshot of togetherness endured through the years?

"Because it was genuine," says Yoko. "Truth hurts some people – there was a lot of chip-chip and trying to make it sound like it was really something that didn't happen.

"Maybe in history, a lot of beautiful miracles that happened have been chipped so much that you don't know about it. It's the loss of the world to not know that miracles could happen. That was one of the miracles to me. It definitely was a magical thing that happened in my life."

Yoko is 70, and she recently enjoyed her first No 1 single, with the remixed "Walking On Thin Ice" having topped the *Billboard* dance chart [*May 2003 – see panel, p128*]. She approached the milestone birthday on February 18 wondering whether she should keep a low profile, knowing that someone would inevitably work out the dates, or make a stand and announce it. Characteristically, she chose the latter – and when the hit single came along only a couple of months after she blew out the candles, she was suddenly happy to celebrate her age and see it as a reassurance to others.

"Some people immediately feel like, 'How dare she? Oh, now, well, she must be doing something, some trick there...' But the majority of people feel really good because they now think that when they're 70 they don't have to worry about it.

"I think that's really good, but also with John and I just getting together – it could happen to anybody. It was just a man and a woman getting together. As long as you know it could happen. It does happen."

Has the idea of 'John and Yoko' become idealised over the years?

"We were just real people, we had our arguments and all that as well. Two very headstrong people. I think that we expressed it differently. It's like yin and yang. He was like very explosive, and I'm the one who's, like, 'Take it in'. It doesn't mean being submissive. Take it in, and it comes out as songs."

Yoko is not your average pensioner. She has recently thrown herself into a new life of late nights and live performances in dance clubs around the world. She has had no cosmetic surgery, but looks like a woman in her fifties – trim, energetic, her short, dark hair glowing with a reddish hue and her black top, with its colourful, butterfly patterns, plunging in a V at the front to reveal a daring cleavage.

Yoko is in Venice for La Biennale festival of contemporary art, where she is exhibiting. It's early in the morning, it's already baking hot, but Yoko is, as usual, welcoming and direct. She is witty, good-humoured and revealing as she skips through what her husband once called their "scrapbook of madness".

Yoko was living in a flat at 25 Hanover Gate Mansions, near London's Regent's Park, with her second husband Tony Cox and their daughter Kyoko. John was stretching out in the splendid surroundings of Kenwood, a palatial, mock-Tudor house in Weybridge, Surrey, with his wife Cynthia and their son Julian. Months had passed since the legendary first meeting of John and Yoko at the Indica Gallery in November 1966. Occasionally, they had bumped into each other at art openings, but apart from a vague mutual interest, there was nothing remarkable between them.

Despite the popular theory that Yoko was frantically inventing schemes to snare the wealthy Beatle, she was struggling with problems in her marriage and also working hard to establish her career in the UK. Arriving in London in September 1966 to perform at the 'Destruction In Art Symposium', Yoko was already respected as an avant-garde artist and performer in New York, where she was allied to the Fluxus movement. She had a trained musical background, and had recently been involved in the improvisational music favoured by her peer group. She had also compiled a book of conceptual and instructional pieces called *Grapefruit*, and printed up a limited edition.

Yoko distributed copies to a number of influential people during 1966-'67. And John Lennon was one of the recipients. This has since been interpreted as one of various ruses on Yoko's part to enchant Lennon.

She retorts: "There was a myth that I sent *Grapefruit* to him... how I wanted to trap him. It was a printed, published book. I had an orange carton of them, a lot of it. I would be giving it to critics. It was that sort of thing. He wasn't the only one who got it."

However, Lennon was intrigued – and would later be clearly inspired – by this book with its instructions to "imagine" various things. Keeping it by his bedside, he found it by turns inspiring and exasperating.

"Finally," says Yoko, "there was a call from him that he'd like me to come to Kenwood. And a car was sent for me, and I went and I was thinking, 'What is this about?' He said he'd read *Grapefruit*, and he wanted to know whether he can get this Light House on the sales list in *Grapefruit*."

Appearing under "Architectural Works" in the book's spoof merchandising list, Light House is described as "a house constructed of light from prisms, which exists in accordance with the changes of the day".

"And he wanted to build that in his garden," smiles Yoko. "I said, 'It's very sweet... but it's conceptual.'" She pauses, laughs affectionately.

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

The 1966 'Destruction In Art Symposium', in which Yoko participated, was organised by Gustav Metzger, whose lectures on Auto-Destructive Art at Ealing Art College were cited by Pete Townshend as an influence on The Who's explosive guitar-smashing stage performances

Dressed in black: John and Yoko on the back seat of a limousine, December 1968

SUSAN WOOD/GETTY IMAGES

And after that: "Many things happened."

It was an unconventional courtship.

"There were times when he would call me," says Yoko. "My guess was that he was in the studio where they [*The Beatles*] had to wait for the engineer to prepare the tapes or whatever. And there was times when he was upstairs on the third floor at Kenwood. He had this kind of a studio, many tape recorders and all that, and he'd be there, probably, just being alone with the tapes. That's the kind of time that it seemed like he called. I was always wondering why he called me. There was many people who used to call and just chat. He wasn't chatty – 'Hi'. Then silence. I wasn't chatty either. There was a lot of silences in the phone call."

In 1967, Yoko talked to John about a show – *Half-A-Wind* – that she wanted to put on at the Lisson Gallery in Bell Street, Marylebone. It went ahead in October and November, and it included her famous "Half-A-Room" – where the furniture and objects are neatly sliced in half and painted white. The other halves are "contained" in 15 empty, labelled bottles of varying sizes. The show was billed as "Yoko And Me", the "me" referring to Lennon, who did not attend because he was "too uptight" but nevertheless funded it.

Yoko: "I didn't have the money to do it. I needed a patron to put up some money, and he [*John*] said he would like to do it. I explained it all, and I'm looking at him and I thought, 'Here's a guy who's an artist himself, and a very good one,' and by then I really felt it was good."

Is this the source of the stories that you were chasing John for his money and profile – as a benefactor for your artwork?

"It's possible. I don't connect in that way. In America too, when I was doing some projects, Tony, my then-husband, would go and raise money and then he would say, 'Oh, so-and-so is putting up the money, so we have to have dinner with him and thank him.' I'd come out at the end – the artist! – and say, 'Thank you.' Tony did the work, kind of thing. With Lisson Gallery, the reason why I went to John – because he invited me to talk about it and everything – it's because Tony and I were not really getting along too well any more, and so I thought, 'Now I have to do it myself.' And it was a bit embarrassing for the artist herself to do it."

How did you feel about asking John for the backing?

"I'm approaching him as a patron to raise money or something. He wanted to do it. He was taking the position of somebody with money and I felt terrible about that. I said, 'Well, why don't you put a piece in there, too?' It's not the kind of thing I'd ever say to anybody. I'm an artist myself who likes to fill the room with my works. He immediately said, and this was funny, 'cos I was putting together 'Half-A-Room' – he said, without even missing a beat, 'Why don't you put the other half in the bottles?' I just thought that was an incredible idea, and I just stood there. It was beautiful. And he was very pleased."

"John made a kind of decisive move on me in 1967, and I didn't think that I should take it. I didn't, in fact..."

He understood your work.

"Of course. It's not like he understood it – he was on exactly the same wavelength. That's the kind of thing that he would do if he had a chance."

Did it surprise you that someone from such a different environment, a pop superstar, could be on the same wavelength?

"What I was amazed about was not so much finding somebody from a different environment – I was just amazed that he was so different from other guys. Because this society is like a male society, they tend to be very conservative. He just wasn't. Or shall we say, I didn't see that side of him at all at that point."

Was that the moment that it all really started?

"What happened was... and it's all mixed up, in a way, in people's minds... I never bothered to talk about it. But there was a time in London – time-wise, the Lisson show was on already – when John made a kind of decisive move to me, and I didn't think that I should take it. I didn't, in fact. After that, there was immediately an invitation I got from the Belgian Knokke Film Festival. They invited me to show my *Film No 4* – the butt film [*aka Bottoms*].

"So I went to the Knokke Film Festival and my work was shown. Then all the artists were going back home and they were saying, 'Are you coming to London?' And a very famous artist called Jean-Jacques Lebel – he and his group said, 'We're going to Paris, do you want to go?' I went to Paris instead of going back to London. I thought, 'I will never go back.' Paris was great fun.

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Yoko with her second husband, American film producer, art promoter and jazz musician Anthony Cox, and their daughter Kyoko Chan Cox, circa 1965

KEYSTONE/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

I kept saying, 'I'm not going to go back to London.' I had this feeling about John – our feelings were getting too close to danger. I thought, 'Totally, that's it.'

"As an animal instinct, I must have known that there was something really seriously wrong there, you know. The kind of incredible attack I got from the whole world – of course, I never knew that that would happen. I knew that we were kind of hot about each other by then. In any situation, it was so easy to run. It was always that. Because it's my instinct to protect myself, I suppose. I could be sort of destroyed."

What made you change your mind about coming back to London?

"So then, he went to India. I was in Paris. It was like that. And fate would have it that [*American modern-jazz saxophonist*] Ornette Coleman came to a show I did in Paris. It was music and performance art. He said he's going to go to Albert Hall to do a concert [*on February 29, 1968*], and would I perform there."

That's an honour...

"You don't know what I was like. I said, 'If you're going to do my composition, I'll come with you.' He said, 'OK, sure.' I didn't want to be a vocalist in somebody else's composition. That was not my style. And then when I went back, well, I went into my apartment – and my then-husband Tony was staying somewhere else – and when I opened the door, there were piles of letters from John in India. [*Hands on heart*] It hit me."

YOKO HAD ALSO been writing to Lennon, who returned from Rishikesh, where he had been studying transcendental meditation with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, earlier than expected. It was spring, and John and Yoko were only a taxi ride away from the love affair that would shock the nation – and The Beatles.

There have been stories that both before and after India, Yoko had pursued John relentlessly, arriving at his house unannounced and bombarding him with phone calls. Yoko has only recently started to address these allegations, replying firmly that it was Lennon who made the running. She tells *Uncut* that on each and every occasion she visited John at Kenwood, it was at his invitation.

What happened when John came back from India?

"I was in London because of this concert that I did with Ornette Coleman. So one day John called me and said, 'OK, shall we meet?' but by then we knew how we were feeling, totally, through the letters. It was at night. He said, 'Are you coming?' I said, 'OK.' He didn't have the driver that night, and so he said, 'Take a taxi.' I went there, and he was waiting with the change to pay the taxi. And that night we made it."

You also recorded the music that became *Unfinished Music No. 1: Two Virgins*...

"Oh yes, of course. John said, 'We can do two things.' He was sitting in the living room. 'One is just sit here and chat, or go up and make music.' He didn't mean 'make music' in a 'funny' way. He really meant make music. [*Giggles*] I said, 'Let's make music.' I'm not very good at small talk, sitting and chatting. That sounded boring to me. It sounds more exciting to make music. We went in the attic and we made music, and that was *Two Virgins*."

Cynthia was abroad at the time. One famous story says that when she came home, she was shocked to find you and John together, and that you were wearing her dressing gown or kimono. Is any of this true?

"That's a dramatic story. I'm not saying it came from Cynthia. I don't know who... maybe some writer embellished it or something like that. First of all, the driver and Lil, who was Julian's nanny – they were reporting to Cynthia all the time. She knew. It was an open thing in a way. She said, 'I don't want to come back now.' The first time that she came, she was with Pattie Boyd's sister [*Jenny*] and [*Magic*] Alex [*Mardas*] and there was another person. So Cynthia and Alex and Pattie Boyd's sister and whoever the guy was said they were gonna visit, and they came in from the garden side.

"I immediately tried to sit a little bit further from John, and John said, 'No, don't worry about that, it's OK.' He just grabbed my hand and we were sitting together, kind of thing. He wanted it that way. I don't know why. He wasn't like, 'My wife is coming, I have to hide the situation.' Totally not like that. They stayed a while to say 'hi', and left from the front door – not in a huff. There was an underlying tension, but we were all civil, like the flower children we were."

So you weren't wearing Cynthia's clothes?

"No, I wasn't wearing... I was always wearing a kind of Indian shirt, one of those loose, cotton pullovers, and the Indian big pants. And their visit happened in May, immediately after John and I started to live together."

Things obviously moved very quickly after that first night together. Was it a hard decision to break away from your past lives?

"It wasn't like that. It was like I was ready to be independent from my marriage and I thought, 'Well, OK then, I would probably live in a loft by

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

While undergoing primal scream therapy in 1970, John unleashed a rage upon his estranged father, Freddie Lennon, that allegedly included death threats and left the man so terrified that he documented it in a letter to his solicitor marked "To be opened in the event of my unnatural death"

myself or something like that.' John didn't like that idea. And so we came together that first time and we finally got together in May – we started living together."

IN HIS MEMORABLE *Rolling Stone* interview with Jann S Wenner, later published in book form as *Lennon Remembers*, John explained his growing attraction to Yoko, who was seven years his senior. The imagination and mischief at play in her exhibitions had struck him. But it was when he kept dipping into *Grapefruit*, and when she sent him a series of instructional cards as part of her 'Dance Event' before the Indian trip, that he really began to react to Yoko. He was fascinated by this diminutive woman whose work annoyed and uplifted him in equal measure. He wanted her to come to Rishikesh, kidding himself it was because of the 'artistic' stimulus she would bring, but he couldn't see how to square it with Cynthia, and bottled out.

For John as well as Yoko, the moment of truth came on the night at Kenwood when they dropped acid, recorded *Two Virgins* and made love at dawn. At the time, he said, he knew "very few" people with whom he could share his interest in experimental, electronic and comedic music. In an interview only two days before he died, he told Radio 1's Andy Peebles: "I realised somebody else was as kind of barmy as me, a wife with sort of freaky sounds and who could equally enjoy non-dance music that was... they call it avant-garde, but whatever it is, you know."

Years earlier, in the first flush of the affair, he had this to say: "I'd never known love like this before, and it hit me so hard that I had to halt my marriage to Cyn. And I don't think that was a reckless decision, because I felt very deeply about it and all the implications that would be involved... My marriage to Cyn was not unhappy. But it was just a normal marital state where nothing happened and which we continued to sustain. You sustain it until you meet somebody who suddenly sets you alight.

"With Yoko, I really knew love for the first time. Our attraction was a mental one, but it happened physically, too. Both are essential in the union..."

From now on, John and Yoko were joined at the hip, and Cynthia resignedly accepted it. She later declared: "I knew at the time there was nothing I could do to stop what was happening. He was hell-bent on something. And it happened to end up he was hell-bent on Yoko . What he was looking for was a woman and a man combined. Someone he could call a pal, someone who was a woman, someone who encompassed everything in his life."

Cynthia could not be that person: "I did not want to go down the road that John was going... which was the road of 'enlightenment' as far as drugs were concerned. John was in a more trapped situation than I was, trapped in his own mind and in The Beatles' situation and the pressure of the music and the pop world. And I think he'd had enough and he wanted to escape that. I had nothing to escape. I wasn't looking for anything else."

It's also been proposed that John was looking for a mother figure, having lost his own mother, Julia, twice – once when she gave the five-year-old over to his Aunt Mimi, who raised him, and then when she was knocked down CONTINUES OVER »

WHEN JOHN MET YOKO...

"I thought he was rather invasive!" Their first meeting was an odd one, as Yoko recalls

IT WOULD BE NICE to believe it was love at first sight, but for Yoko at least, it was the opposite. John Lennon would go on to reminisce fondly about the day they met at the Indica art gallery in Mason's Yard, London. He had accepted an invitation to the venue, co-owned by Marianne Faithfull's husband John Dunbar, because he was intrigued by tales of this "amazing woman" who was putting on "a happening", possibly involving people climbing into black bags and doing who knows what inside them.

Many of the Ono pieces that would later become world famous were included in her Indica collection, titled *Unfinished Paintings And Objects*. Among them were *Painting To Hammer A Nail*, comprising a board, a hammer and a metal bucket full of nails; *Apple*, featuring an apple on a pedestal; and *Ceiling Painting (YES Painting)*, inviting visitors to climb a ladder and look through a magnifying glass at a tiny word in the centre of a framed sheet of paper.

Turning out for the preview of the show on November 9, 1966, Lennon was made welcome to stroll around – an hour before Yoko had expected any company. She was horrified. It was only her second artistic venture in London – and she wanted everything to be perfect before anyone walked through the doors.

When John sauntered in with Dunbar, the students from St Martin's School Of Art – who had helped with the exhibits – were still lounging around in the basement, one of the two floors housing the show.

"I told him [*Dunbar*] not to let anybody in until everything's ready," says Yoko. "And lo and behold, he just came in with a guy. 'What is he doing?' Then I thought, 'Well, I'm not going to say anything about it.' I didn't want to insult him in front of his friend. Obviously, he must be a good friend. I said 'Hello.'"

Lennon was unaware of Yoko's rising tension as he moved around with Dunbar, ever more "astounded" and "impressed" by the humour and imagination central to Yoko Ono's art. Both he and Yoko have stated on many occasions that she had no idea who John was until Dunbar made the introductions.

Yoko remembers: "They went downstairs. Works like *Apple* were there, and so I went downstairs and I saw that they were both standing in front of the hammer-and-nail painting.

"The guy [*John*] was looking at this blank board very seriously. Then he said, 'May I hammer a nail in?' So I said, 'OK, if you pay five shillings, then you can.'

"I didn't know that he didn't have any money. He didn't have to carry any money."

Lennon famously suggested: "Well, may I hammer an imaginary nail in that painting if I give you an imaginary five shillings?"

The idea of imagining this and imagining that was one of the major themes of the exhibition.

Yoko: "I thought, 'Oh, that's interesting. He's already playing my game,' kind of thing. It was so quick."

Lennon enjoyed *Ceiling Painting*.... He later recalled that after climbing the ladder and squinting through the spyglass to see the word "yes", he was so relieved at the positive message that he immediately became a fan of Yoko Ono.

"And then he said, 'Where's this happening event?'" relates Yoko. "I said, 'Well, today's event is this.' I showed this card, and the word in the centre of the card just said, 'Breathe'. He went like... [*zooms forward quickly, her face just an inch away, and inhales deeply*] He came so close, with his big nose, and breathed me in, and he said, 'Like this?'"

How lovely.

"I didn't think it was lovely. I thought it was rather invasive. The next thing, he grabbed the apple from the stand, and took a bite of it. Now I didn't like that at all. I was, like, 'What is going on here?' It showed on my face, I suppose. He went [*mimics John's sheepish giggle*], and put it back on the stand."

Yoko envisaged her whole exhibition being ruined in front of her eyes.

"I was busy thinking, 'If people are going to do that, maybe I have to put a sign out saying "Don't touch", but that would be uncool. What am I going to do?'"

In the event, she did nothing but cross her fingers that John Lennon would start behaving.

"The first impression I had of him, looking at the hammer-and-nail painting like as if it's *Mona Lisa*, was he looked very beautiful, a very elegant kind of guy. That nice feeling about it. It would be nice to have an affair or something with somebody like this. Then I thought, 'I'm too busy now.' When he did the apple – 'Oh, well, forget it.'"

Yoko sits in a white-painted half bedroom entitled "Half-a-Room", part of her *Half-a-Memory* show at the Lisson Gallery in London, July 11, 1968

ROGER JONES/KEYSTONE FEATURES/GETTY IMAGES

and killed in 1958. John's pet name for Yoko was Mother.

The other Beatles were perplexed, unsettled by Yoko's constant presence, later becoming resentful and hostile. Not only was she invading the sacrosanct territory of their 'boys club', but she was distracting John from them and from the band. As Yoko introduced Lennon to new, leftfield interests that they didn't share, and as his outlook broadened, so they saw his personality 'change'. John later confirmed: "That old gang of mine was over the moment I met her."

The Beatles regrouped in the studio at the end of May 1968 to start work on the 'White Album'. As the sessions continued through the summer and autumn, their intolerance of Yoko increased, especially when she felt inclined to contribute her unorthodox vocals to the recordings, or dared to venture a critical opinion – which she felt justified in doing, given her musical training. ("Revolution 9" was almost entirely the work of John and Yoko.)

However, it was the way in which the couple isolated themselves from the others that caused the greatest alarm. Yoko has since explained that John wanted her by his side in Abbey Road, and later ordered a bed to be brought into the studio so she could be there even when she was ill. She has also revealed that he was jealous of any conversations she had with the other Beatles. Therefore, she kept her distance. As John described it, "Suddenly, we were together all the time in a corner, mumbling and giggling... and my attention completely went off them."

He also said, "Everybody seemed to be paranoid except for us two who were in the glow of love... All this madness is going on around us because we just happened to want to be together all the time."

George Harrison said in the *Anthology* that he was bothered by having a "stranger" in their midst and also by a "weird vibe" emanating from John and Yoko. He regarded her as a "wedge", driving herself deeply between Lennon and his bandmates. Paul McCartney remembered a feeling that Yoko had "encroached on the framework that we'd had going for us", and that it was "fairly offputting". Ringo reported that The Beatles had been "very possessive of each other", and that Yoko's presence created tension.

Press officer Derek Taylor commented: "Yoko had taken the place of everybody in John's life. Since they had met, she was his life and he was hers and they were very co-dependent people. They had no life outside each other."

John put it like this: "Being with Yoko makes me free... We are two halves, and together we're a whole." He was still bitterly angry about The Beatles' treatment of her when he talked to Wenner in 1970.

"They despised her," he raged. "They insulted her and they still do... They all sat there with their fucking wives and judged us... Ringo was all right. So was Maureen [*Starkey*]. But the other two really gave it to us. I'll never forgive them."

He later became more conciliatory towards Paul and, certainly, George. And Yoko, today, chooses her words carefully when she talks to *Uncut* about the other Beatles members.

"Actually, they were very civilised people, of course, and they weren't really nasty to me. I noticed a few things on a very delicate level. When they were recording and I was there, I suppose it wasn't something that they really wanted but, at the same time, John was there, so they weren't going to make a fuss. I don't nit-pick on it, because it wasn't so bad. But, of course, there were moments... but there were moments between them all."

Ringo, for one, left the band during this period because he felt like "an outsider". George had already "had enough" of The Beatles, complaining that he was being treated as an inferior, especially by Paul, and was looking to a future involving Indian music, culture, philosophy and religion.

"Yoko taught me about women," said Lennon. He also asserted that, "She's the teacher and I'm the pupil."

"Most people think that he was just a wild thing. But he had a very considerate side. And he was wise..."

WIDELY REGARDED AS as something of a misogynist in his earlier years, with allegations of violence, the tough and cynical Lennon was perhaps an unlikely candidate for a new life of peace, love, flowers and feminism. Yoko has since disclosed that he was never violent towards her.

Do you think you brought out the more compassionate side of John?

Yoko: "Most people think that he was just a wild thing. He had a very considerate side. And wise. A lot of things were brought out from him around that time. It's not necessarily just being with me, but I think it had a lot to do with the fact that he was repressing all that before the opportunity was given to him to just be himself."

Did he bring out anything new in you?

"It's not so much bringing out in me. One is the fact that I learnt a great deal from entering his world, because it's a world that I never even thought existed; the rock world. And also, he was extremely wise about how to deal with the press. Paul is a better dealer with the press, I'm sure. John was not so much of a person to manipulate the press at all.

"I came from a tradition of 'not concerned about the press', kind of ivory tower and a bit of snobbery and all that. On the stage [*during past performance-art events*], when the curtain's up, you see me with my back against the audience. That was the attitude. And so everybody walked out of your concert – it's a successful concert! A classic avant-garde idea.

"So when we did the 'You Are Here' show, John's show [*his first complete art exhibition, at the Robert Fraser Gallery in Duke Street, London, on July 1, 1968*], we came out of the car and there were tons of reporters there, and the photographers, and my first instinct was, 'Let's immediately rush into the back room.' He said, 'They are waiting and we have to accommodate [*them*].' We stood and let them take the photos. I thought, 'Oh, that's what you do.' To that extent, I was totally naïve."

From the beginning, you and John set out to celebrate your relationship in records, film, on TV and in the press. Why was this important?

"John was more gung-ho about it, and I thought that was good in a way – like now that I'm announcing that I'm 70 – to just clarify things and let people know that it's fine, it's OK. Likewise, when John and I got together, he wanted to share with the world – and the reasons probably were similar to mine. One, out of love, of course, but also, two, to show that man and woman can stand together, and also we were from different parts of the world."

So it was a stand against sexism and racism. Yet these were the very things that you experienced from the public after stepping out with John. How disappointing was that?

"It [*racism*] was always there, and also sexism was obviously always there. Most women had to cope with it, I suppose. They're still coping. Racism, too, is still there. You can't speak out enough about it. The more you speak about it and mix together and everything, people will start to think that equality is a good thing."

LENNON SAID OF the controversial *Two Virgins* sleeve photograph, featuring himself and Yoko in full-frontal nudity: "We used the straightest, most unflattering picture just to show that we were human" – a recurring theme throughout their autobiographical ventures. He also explained: "We felt like two virgins because we were in love, just met, and we were trying to make something."

The picture stunned not only the media but everyone in The Beatles' organisation – including Ringo, who described it as "the mind-blower". The album should have been Apple's first release, but it was held up for months over the refusal by EMI in the UK and Capitol in America to handle it, and it was finally distributed to the shops in brown paper bags through two small companies: Track (Britain) and Tetragrammaton (US). Some 30,000 copies were confiscated in New Jersey, and many shops refused to stock it.

Yet John and Yoko would go further, filming themselves apparently making love in footage that would be released on video.

Was this an inhibiting or liberating experience?

Yoko: "We didn't do it really porno."

It's more sensual, romantic...

"We thought so, too. It was a romantic version of *Two Virgins*. It was a little bit gritty. Saying to the world that it's all right to look as you are; I was four months pregnant. With making that, making love is not confronting the world – it's a different

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

When Tony Cox went into hiding with his and Yoko's daughter Kyoko, he joined a Christian cult called the Church Of The Living Word, from which he 'escaped' in 1977. Cox discussed his experiences with the Lennons and the cult in the 1985 documentary *Vain Glory*

C. MAHER/DAILY EXPRESS/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

John and Yoko with Allen Klein, who is representing Lennon in negotiations over control of shares in The Beatles' Northern Songs, April 29, 1969

kind of message, I think, and that's what we wanted to convey."

You got married on March 20, 1969. What is your most vivid memory of that day?

"It was just very sweet. It was in Gibraltar and all that, and it was exactly the way we wanted – casual enough, but also romantic, and it expresses a clothing that's casual. That's something that we loved. That's how the whole thing was – casual but loving."

During the honeymoon, you held a week-long bed-in for peace in the Amsterdam Hilton, and there were similar events in Canada. How strongly did you feel that together you could help to change the world, even a little bit, and did you?

"We thought it's good to do it that way, with a sense of humour. It was a laugh, in a way. Some people took us seriously and were attacking us. But, actually, it was a big clown thing. And through clowning, we communicated the idea of world peace being very important...

"We were inspired by what was being done at the time, which was very serious. People were distributing pamphlets about world peace, but nobody wanted to know or to read, and especially the young didn't want to do anything about it. We wanted to express in the way that our constituents would understand or appreciate."

The media had a field day. John and Yoko invited ridicule, and got it in bucketloads. John admired the events that Yoko had staged for peace before they became a couple – memorably wrapping one of the Trafalgar Square lions in cloth – and he remained interested in the concept of "extreme concealment", later dubbed "bagism".

In their first public event, in June 1968, John and Yoko planted acorns for peace at Coventry Cathedral, and soon afterwards attended the London premiere of Victor Spinetti's *The John Lennon Play: In His Own Write*. They were besieged by journalists: "Where's your wife, Mr Lennon?" Overnight, Yoko Ono became Public Enemy Number One.

Upset but undeterred, John and Yoko continued their crusades. After the Amsterdam bed-in, they held a press conference in Vienna in a white bag and, in April 1969, sent acorns to leaders around the world. The Canadian bed-ins happened over May and June in Toronto and Montreal, where during a week in bed they wrote and recorded "Give Peace A Chance" with everyone who happened to be visiting.

This coincided with the UK release of a new Beatles single – "The Ballad Of John And Yoko". Only John and Paul played on the track, with McCartney adding drums, bass, piano and percussion to John's account of his wedding and honeymoon.

Ironically, this was the follow-up single to "Get Back", which John had interpreted as an attack on Yoko by McCartney.

Their private lives had also been making headlines. John and Yoko were living in a flat owned by Ringo at 34 Montagu Square, Marylebone when, on October 18, 1968, they were busted by the drug squad. The team found a quantity of marijuana which John and Yoko later claimed was planted – although John did also wonder whether it could have been an old, forgotten stash.

Only days afterwards, Yoko announced she was pregnant. But early in November, she was rushed into Queen Charlotte's Hospital amid fears of a miscarriage. John camped at her bedside and made a series of recordings which turned into the *Life With The Lions* album, in line with his new philosophy that songs should be like newspapers.

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JOHN & PAUL, YOKO & LINDA

Being a Beatle wife...

THE RELATIONSHIP between Lennon and McCartney was perhaps too intense to accommodate the women who would bring to each a lasting love. After Yoko and Linda arrived on the scene within a couple of months of each other, there were no cosy dinners for the two most famous couples in music. Yoko implies a respect for Linda when asked if the four ever socialised.

"Not that much. You see, The Beatles was always more the guys getting together sort of thing, and the wives were in the kitchen when they were talking business in the living room. I was surprised. That's how it was. John was saying, 'You stay with me.' When Linda came in, of course, she wasn't in the kitchen either."

John was once quoted as saying that, "Linda and Yoko never had an argument, ever."

KEYSTONE-FRANCE/GAMMA-KEYSTONE VIA GETTY IMAGES, EVENING STANDARD/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

On November 21, Yoko miscarried the baby – John Ono Lennon II, who was properly buried in a secret ceremony.

Attending Marylebone Magistrates Court on November 28, John pleaded guilty to possession of cannabis, keeping Yoko out of things for fear she would be deported. His solicitor suggested that the stress arising from the bust had contributed to Yoko's miscarriage. Lennon was fined £150 and told to pay costs of 20 guineas (£21) – and the conviction would lead to serious problems. It inhibited his ability to travel, and it would be seized upon by the Nixon administration as an excuse to deport him from America.

The US authorities disliked the couple anyway. In January 1969, the FBI opened a file on John because of the "subversive" nature of *Two Virgins*. His newly acquired police record meant the Lennons had to stage their bed-ins in Canada rather than America, although they came to like the Dominion, which was generally supportive of their peace initiatives while affording access to the US media.

On the domestic front, John legally changed his name to John Ono Lennon in a ceremony on the roof of the Apple building at 3 Savile Row on April 22, 1969, stating: "Yoko changed her name for me. I've changed mine for her. One for both, both for each other." The next month saw them move into Tittenhurst Park, a Georgian mansion with 70 acres of land at Sunningdale, near Ascot in Berkshire. By now, John and Yoko had discovered heroin.

John had enjoyed a succession of drugs, beginning with alcohol. In the early years, The Beatles had gobbled Preludin amphetamine tablets – "Prellies". Abandoning pills and alcohol in favour of pot at the time of *Help!*, John soon graduated to acid, commenting that, "I must have had a thousand trips. I used to just eat it all the time."

Talking to Jann Wenner about smack, Lennon remembered: "We sniffed a little when we were in real pain... People were giving us such a hard time. And I've had so much shit thrown at me and especially at Yoko... We took H because of what The Beatles and their pals were doing to us."

In a 1997 conversation with *Uncut*, Yoko expanded: "We both felt it was very effective in the sense of slowing down our minds. If you get an upper, because we're both very up people anyway, we would just go crazy with this. So we couldn't take an upper, you know. We took a downer."

She revealed that they experienced several periods of heroin use – and never found a decent dealer. However, it was their withdrawal from that first encounter with smack that gave rise to the chilling "Cold Turkey", released in October 1969 by the Plastic Ono Band – a 'conceptual' group featuring John, Yoko and any musicians who happened to join them.

Yet their withdrawal from the heroin substitute methadone was even more horrific.

Yoko said: "It was the wrong information that somebody gave us that there was a new drug called methadone and that gives you the same high as smack, but you don't get hooked on it, and so, 'Whoopee', you know, and at that time we were totally dry. So most people take methadone because they want to withdraw from smack and we weren't taking smack, we weren't taking anything, so it was the silliest thing to do. So we got hooked on methadone..."

Coming off methadone was "the hardest thing that I've ever done," Yoko added. "And I'm sure that's true for John, too... After that, we couldn't get hooked on anything."

John and Yoko leaving Heathrow Airport for Toronto and the next stage of their peace campaign, December 16, 1969

CUMMINGS ARCHIVES/REDFERNS

LENNON WAS CONDUCTING two careers, one with The Beatles and the other with Yoko. He was thrilled and excited by her unconventional approach to music, art, film and protest, and he promoted her work endlessly. She was, he said, "the ultimate trip".

In November 1968, The Beatles released the 'White Album', and only a week later, John and Yoko's long-delayed *Two Virgins* emerged. At the same time, "Hey Jude" – Paul's song of reassurance to Julian Lennon over his parents' split – was selling millions.

In the new year, the *Yellow Submarine* soundtrack entered the shops, and the Fab Four performed for the last time on the roof at Apple on January 30. John and Yoko carried on with *Unfinished Music No 2: Life With The Lions*, released in May 1969 by Zapple – Apple's new experimental label – and, two months later, with the Plastic Ono Band's first single, "Give Peace A Chance".

In August, The Beatles were recording their final album, *Abbey Road* (although it would be released before *Let It Be*). At the beginning of 1969, at Paul's instigation, they had been filmed rehearsing in Twickenham Film Studios and the Abbey Road basement, and the so-called "Get Back" sessions resulted in the *Let It Be* album and movie. In an atmosphere of apathy, misery and ill-temper, with George storming out and John and Yoko in what seemed like a heroin-spun cocoon that completed their withdrawal from the other Beatles, the group disintegrated in glorious Technicolor.

Lennon, however, was exhilarated by the minimalist, arty films he'd been making with

Yoko – 1968's *Smile*, *Two Virgins* and the controversial *Rape*, where a randomly chosen female was stalked by a cameraman. They would produce a string of equally infamous morsels, including *Self Portrait*, with Lennon's private member attempting an erection, *Up Your Legs Forever*, showing more than 300 pairs of legs, and *Fly*, in which a fly explored a woman's naked body. However, 1972's *Imagine* was a glossy, mainstream production mostly set in Tittenhurst Park.

John: "I decided that I could no longer artistically get anything out of The Beatles. And here was somebody [*Yoko*] that could turn me on to a million things."

Lennon missed playing live, and now he realised he could do that with Yoko, too. In December 1968 they performed at The Rolling Stones' legendary Rock'n'Roll Circus as The Dirty Mac with Eric Clapton, Keith Richards (on bass) and Jimi Hendrix's drummer, Mitch Mitchell.

Flying out to Toronto the following year for the September 13 "Rock'n'Roll Revival" concert, Lennon told manager Allen Klein on the plane that he had decided to quit The Beatles. He also informed Eric Clapton and Klaus Voormann, who along with drummer Alan White comprised the latest, makeshift incarnation of the Plastic Ono Band. "Full of junk" and throwing up from that and nerves, Lennon followed on with an amazing performance that featured Yoko in a bag for the majority of the set, emerging only for her own spectacular finale. Lennon: "The buzz was incredible!"

A week later, at a meeting in London, he told Paul, George and Ringo he was leaving, and agreed to keep it secret for the time being. Their next releases – *Abbey Road* in September and the "Let It Be" single in March 1970 – went ahead without any fuss.

For John and Yoko, it was business as usual. In November, a couple of weeks after the release of the *Wedding Album*, John returned his MBE to Buckingham Palace.

They launched their "War Is Over (If You Want It)" poster campaign in December, and in January were again outraging public decency when the police raided an exhibition of John's "Bag One" lithographs (depicting his honeymoon with Yoko) at a London gallery. The eight confiscated prints were later deemed by a court not to be obscene. Later that month, the Lennons wrote and recorded "Instant Karma" in a day, their first collaboration with producer Phil Spector.

They had issued a statement on New Year's Eve to declare 1970 "Year 1 AP (After Peace)": "We believe that the last decade was the end of the old machine crumbling to pieces. And we think we can get it together, with your help. We have great hopes for the new year."

However, there were no great hopes for The Beatles. Paul's determination to keep them together felt to the others stifling, dictatorial, with John complaining he treated them like "sidemen" during the "Get Back" sessions. Realising this, McCartney tried to hold his tongue, but both John and George could already see a future away from the band. It looked very attractive.

> **"Coming off methadone was the hardest thing I've ever done... After that, we couldn't get hooked on anything"**

The Beatles' finances had been in chaos. They had lost the ownership of many of their songs, and Apple was losing money hand over fist. John, George and Ringo successfully fought for the appointment of American businessman Allen Klein to sort things out – against McCartney's father-in-law Lee Eastman and his son John. It had been getting nasty.

It would get nastier still in April 1970 when, a month before the release of *Let It Be*, Paul announced his solo album, *McCartney*, with the news that he was leaving The Beatles – to the fury of Lennon, who had observed his vow of silence. It would take years in court to disentangle their affairs, McCartney successfully suing the other three to extricate himself from their partnership, which resulted in their assets being frozen.

Beatles fans, naturally, blamed Yoko for the split, and John called them "idiots". But his loyalty to Yoko, and commitment to their life together, certainly contributed.

Lennon: "I can't impose far-out films or far-out music on George and Paul if they don't want to do it. Vice versa. Paul can't impose on me whatever he likes, especially if there's no common goal."

He also explained: "From the day I met her [*Yoko*], she demanded equal time, equal space, equal rights – I think that's what kills people like Presley. The king is always killed by his courtiers, not by his enemies. The king is over-fed, over-indulged, anything to keep him tied to his throne – and what Yoko did for me was to liberate me from that situation. And that's how The Beatles ended. Not because Yoko split The Beatles, but because she showed me what it was to be Elvis Beatle..."

Ringo later commented: "Yoko's taken a lot of shit, her and Linda, but The Beatles' break-up wasn't their fault. It was just that suddenly we were all 30 and married and changed."

Paul claimed he felt inhibited by Yoko, but was also "jealous" and afraid for the Lennon-McCartney partnership.

John: "I presumed I would just be able to carry on and just bring Yoko into our life, but it seemed that I either had to be married to them or Yoko. I chose Yoko, you know? And I was right."

He added: "There is no reason on CONTINUES OVER »

STEPHANE CARDINALE/SYGMA VIA GETTY IMAGES

KEEPING HIS MEMORY ALIVE

How Yoko has protected Lennon's legacy

● She created John's memorial garden, Strawberry Fields, in New York's Central Park, across the road from the Dakota Building.

● She gave "Free As A Bird" and "Real Love" to Paul, George and Ringo so they could be worked into 'new' Beatles songs for the *Anthology* project.

● She helped establish the John Lennon Memorial Scholarship at the University of Liverpool.

● She has mounted billboard campaigns displaying messages from "John and Yoko" – a continuation of the "War Is Over" crusade the couple first launched over Christmas 1969.

● She unveiled a seven-foot bronze statue of John at Liverpool's renamed John Lennon Airport in March 2002.

● In the same week, she bought Mendips, the house John shared with his Aunt Mimi at 251 Menlove Avenue, Allerton, and donated it to the National Trust. John had taken Yoko to Liverpool in January 1971, and the then-occupants of the house had invited them inside. Yoko tells *Uncut* how it felt to return there last year: "When I saw John's bedroom, I was really feeling very emotional. It was a very emotional experience to go through, because it's where he started to dream about all the stuff he later shared with the world."

● She saved the sacrosanct Lennon-McCartney songwriting credit from turning into McCartney-Lennon by forcing Sir Paul into a climb-down. He had wanted to reverse the order of the names for his own songs. When asked, she smiles half-apologetically and says: "We did it. It was John, as well. John and I did it together."

Yoko presents her book *Strawberry Fields* in the garden of the House of Latin America, Paris

earth why I should be without her. There is nothing more important than our relationship, nothing. And we dig being together all the time... I'm not going to sacrifice love, real love, for any fuckin' whore or any friend, or any business, because in the end you're alone at night."

JOHN AND YOKO had been travelling. In December 1969 they returned to Toronto, staying with country singer Ronnie Hawkins, from whose home they issued peace messages. They also announced a three-day peace festival for July 1970, although the plans would eventually collapse, with Yoko admitting that, as artists, they were not the world's best organisers. In Ottawa, they met Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. "If all politicians were like Trudeau," said John, "there would be world peace."

For the new year, they flew to Denmark to visit Kyoko, now living with her father, Tony Cox, and his new wife Melinda, near Aalborg. Cox had become religious and disapproving of tobacco, alcohol and drugs. He later reported that John and Yoko "did a lot of symbolic things" – they stubbed cigarettes out in the snow and chopped off their hair.

Finally receiving US visas, they flew to Los Angeles in April 1970 to continue the "Primal Therapy" course they had begun in England with psychotherapist Arthur Janov, together exorcising childhood demons – and learning of their potential for self-destruction.

"We'd be together 24 hours a day... to protect our love," said John. "We were really beginning to choke each other."

Yoko added: "Though we were in love desperately... we were possessive and jealous and all that."

Although they later denounced Janov, they poured his primal screaming techniques into two radical and powerfully intense albums, *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* and *Yoko Ono/ Plastic Ono Band*, both recorded with Phil Spector and released in December 1970.

With the sessions complete, they flew to New York to work on *Up Your Legs Forever* and *Fly*, helped by an Allen Klein employee called May Pang. And then they were off to Japan. In January 1971, John met his in-laws for the first time at their home in Fujisawa, outside Tokyo. Yoko's mother later commented: "My husband and I found Lennon very nice and gentle."

Also for family reasons, the Lennons flew to Majorca in April, where Tony Cox was studying meditation with the Maharishi, no less. They had hired private detectives to find Cox, who had disappeared with Kyoko after the Danish visit. The trip ended with John and Yoko being questioned by police about their alleged kidnapping of Kyoko from a playground. Eventually, Kyoko was returned to Cox's care, and the Lennons were advised to seek a custody order from the authorities in the Virgin Islands, where Yoko and Cox were divorced.

In May, the abduction charges were dropped, and despite a series of court proceedings which saw Cox jailed for refusing to produce the child, Yoko would not see her daughter again for three decades – even though she was granted temporary and then permanent custody. Cox had vanished again with his family, and this time they could not be found.

You were accused of kidnapping your own daughter...

Yoko: "Yeah."

How did you feel about that?

"Well, I can't go into it..."

John and Yoko were spending more and more time in America, flying in and out with assistant May Pang. They stayed in the UK for long enough to record and film most of Lennon's *Imagine* and Yoko's *Fly*, to promote the paperback publication of Yoko's *Grapefruit* and to march in a couple of political rallies in London. When they returned to New York in August 1971, it was for good. John sold Tittenhurst Park to Ringo, and never saw England again.

In America, he said: "We want to stay permanently because New York is the centre of the Earth and also because we want to find Yoko's daughter, Kyoko."

They lived at the St Regis hotel, where they celebrated the No 1 success of *Imagine*, released in the autumn. Almost devoid of the raw emotion that distinguished *John Lennon/ Plastic Ono Band*, it does, however, boast one scalding Lennon moment with "How Do You Sleep?", apparently provoked by "Dear Boy" and "Too Many People" from McCartney's recently released *Ram* album.

In October, John and Yoko moved into their first New York apartment, at 105 Bank Street in Greenwich Village. There they would be watched, followed and bugged by the American secret services. They had been batty hippies; now they were dangerous subversives, or so it was feared.

Did you realise at the time that you were such a threat to the American authorities?

Yoko: "We didn't expect that and, of course, we were doing it in such a peaceful way as opposed to all the other friends of ours. They were peaceful, but not as peaceful as we were. We thought that was OK."

Did these friends use the Lennons?

"If they used us, they were justified, because they really had an incredibly strong belief in what they were doing... but we were not in synch with them."

John and Yoko were becoming more political. At the tail end of 1969 in London, they took up the case of James Hanratty, convicted of murder in 1962 and hanged at Bedford Prison. They upheld his innocence at events including a Plastic Ono Band concert for UNICEF at the London Lyceum on December 15 (although in 2002, DNA tests on Hanratty's exhumed body established his guilt "beyond doubt"). They had also connected with black power leader Michael X, swapping locks of their hair (shorn in Denmark) for a pair of Muhammad Ali's shorts to auction for peace. With March 1971's "Power To The People", they had returned to the idea of change through the masses, but this time from a left-wing viewpoint.

GIMME SOME TRUTH!

Mark Chapman has applied, and been denied parole nine times; the hearing for his most recent application being in August 2016. Yoko Ono has consistently opposed his release. "Myself and John's two sons would not feel safe for the rest of our lives," she has said in a statement

Now, in Bank Street, they mixed with New York's leading militants including Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, Rennie Davis, Dave Dellinger, Black Panther leader Bobby Seale and left-wing luminaries Allen Ginsberg and Phil Ochs. On December 10, 1971, the Lennons played a benefit in Ann Arbor, Michigan for John Sinclair, MC5 manager and chairman of the White Panther Party, jailed for 10 years in 1969 for a minor marijuana offence. Shortly afterwards, they appeared as a duo at a Harlem fundraiser for victims' families in the Attica State prison riots. They were now under surveillance by the FBI and the immigration authorities, although few really believed their claims that they were being watched and bugged.

In the new year, a classified memo warned that John and Yoko had become powerful tools of the "new left". It recommended the termination of John's visa, and deportation proceedings began on the basis of his old drug conviction. But it was imperative for the Lennons to remain in New York: they had been granted temporary custody of Kyoko on condition they bring her up in America – and they were still looking for her. The hearings

TERRY DISNEY/EXPRESS/GETTY IMAGES

Offering their newly shorn hair to controversial activist Michael X, February 1970

and appeals dragged on, and on April Fool's Day 1973 they would pointedly announce the birth of a new country, Nutopia, which would have "no land, no boundaries, no passports, only people".

The double album *Some Time In New York City*, recorded with Elephant's Memory and released in September 1972, dwelled on feminism, prisons, the British in Ireland, John Sinclair and Angela Davis, the black American radical championed as a political prisoner. It was panned. It was followed in February 1973 by Yoko's highly regarded *Approximately Infinite Universe* – and two more albums, Lennon's *Mind Games* and Yoko's *Feeling The Space*, appeared in November 1973.

THEY WERE GETTING on each other's nerves. While their campaigns and projects were truly bonding, there was inevitably a disadvantage to being in each other's pockets all the time. Yoko was feeling the strain of being seen as Mrs Lennon rather than as a person and artist in her own right, and had taken to performing solo concerts.

The couple had been living with the threat of deportation for a long time, and they had been dealing with various legal and business problems, including their dropping of Allen Klein, "for many reasons", in April 1973, with Lennon conceding that "possibly Paul's suspicions were right... and the time was right."

The next month, they moved into their seventh-floor, luxury apartment in the Dakota Building, overlooking Central Park at West 72nd Street – where they would later buy more suites for office and storage space. At the same time, they learned that Yoko had been granted permanent custody of Kyoko, who was still missing. By September, they had decided on a temporary separation. John was about to embark on his legendary "Lost Weekend" with his lover and the Lennons' full-time assistant, May Pang, who was 10 years his junior.

Pang has since declared that her affair with Lennon started in August – at Yoko's instigation – towards the end of the *Mind Games* sessions, while all three were under the same roof at the Dakota. It continued in Los Angeles and New York during the 16-month Lost Weekend, ending when Lennon returned to Yoko.

Lennon said of the separation, in typically dramatic manner: "Yoko kicked me out! She literally kicked me out! I said, 'OK, OK, I'm going... bachelor free.' I've been married all my life and I thought, 'Whoooo–whoooo-yippee!' But it was godawful."

Despite Pang's contention that "he was my soulmate" and that "we did fall in love", John spent much of the Lost Weekend drunk, unhappy and anxious to return home. At one point, he was accused and cleared of assaulting a waitress, and of hitting a female photographer, an allegation which he paid his way out of, but still denied. John later said: "I wanted to be with her [*Yoko*] and could not literally survive without her. As a functioning human being, I just went to pieces. I didn't realise that I needed her so much."

How did the Lost Weekend come about?

Yoko: "It's not him... it was me, because I felt by that time it was so stressful about the immigration and all that – it was coming to a point that I felt he was thinking about other girls, or looking around, but he wasn't. He was feeling so guilty he wouldn't even look around. I didn't want somebody thinking about things like that when they're sitting with me. It's very unflattering, isn't it? So I said, 'We're both still attractive and young, and let's not do this to ourselves and let's look around.'"

"I suggested May Pang to John... It wasn't to manipulate them. But I just knew there was something else..."

It's been suggested that you set up John with May Pang so that you could manipulate the affair.

"It's more delicate than that... So then John said he doesn't want to do it in the same city I'm living in. I said, 'How about LA?' I knew that he had a great time there before, with The Beatles. He said, 'OK, that's good, but I never travel alone.' I suggested a few people, including May – because she was a very good assistant as well. It wasn't to manipulate them into whatever. But I just knew there was something else..."

You thought that something might happen between them?

"I kind of figured it."

When you said, "Let's look around," did you also look around?

"What I found out is that for guys, it's very easy. You go somewhere and everybody arranges so you can have fun. With a woman or a wife of a person, I think it's a different situation, and nobody's going to suggest or help you. You're just sitting in the corner. I went to a Buddhist lecture and I learnt a new mantra. I went through all different religious organisations to check out things. All different kinds of philosophy I got into, New Age philosophy more than the old ones.

"John actually did make the statement afterwards – 'You know what happened to me there, but Yoko on the other hand was really researching all different philosophical ideas, and very different [*to*] how I coped with it.' "

How did you feel when you heard the stories about him drinking and getting chucked out of clubs with sanitary towels on his head?

"I think he wanted to come back. But he wasn't ready for it at the time."

In retrospect, do you think the separation was a positive thing?

"It was really very, very good, even in hindsight. I liked the fact that I suggested it, so John sowed his oats. If I hadn't given him that opportunity, I would have been feeling guilty now."

As well as revelling at the Rainbow Bar & Grill and the Troubadour with Harry Nilsson, Keith Moon and Ringo, John was keeping busy. In October 1973, he started work with Phil Spector on the *Rock'N'Roll* covers album at the Record Plant and A&M studios. Yet for reasons of his own, the volatile producer, who had at one point, reputedly, fired a gun into the studio ceiling, kidnapped the tapes and refused to hand them over.

Lennon: "And we had to sue through Capitol to get them back."

He added: "The LA sessions gradually collapsed into mania... it definitely got crazy. There are 28 guys playing a night and 15 of them are out of their mind... including me." And he vowed: "That's the first time I let an album out of my control – I'll never do it again." With the album unexpectedly halted, Lennon made promotional appearances for *Mind Games* as the year drew to an end.

The spring of 1974 was a sobering experience. In March, Lennon began production work on his drinking buddy Harry Nilsson's *Pussy Cats* album, for which he had also written the track "Mucho Mungo". At the time, he was sharing a beach house in Santa Monica with Nilsson, Starr and Moon.

"And one day I realised, 'Jesus, I'm the producer...' And we'd go in, the bottle would be out and everybody was just falling on the floor and nobody was working, so I sobered up then. I just quit, cold turkey, the drink." The album was eventually finished in New York.

During this period, Paul and Linda McCartney had been visiting Lennon, and the world's greatest musical partnership was reunited for a jam session at the beach house, with

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Paul playing drums. It seemed they were beginning to build some bridges.

In April, John and May returned to New York, where they rented an apartment in East 52nd Street. Within two months Lennon had begun work on *Walls And Bridges* at the Record Plant – and, at the same time, the Spector tapes were returned. He finished *Walls And Bridges* first, and while he was working in the studio in August, Yoko was touring Japan with the Plastic Ono Super Band. In October, John knocked out more songs for *Rock'N'Roll*, leaving only four of the original Spector recordings on the record.

Elton John had duetted with John on the *Walls And Bridges* single "Whatever Gets You Thru The Night", and he struck a deal with Lennon: if the single made No 1, Lennon would perform onstage with him at Madison Square Garden. On November 16, both *Walls And Bridges* and "Whatever Gets You oThru The Night" topped the US charts. Twelve days later, Lennon was onstage with Elton, playing "I Saw Her Standing There", "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds" and "Whatever Gets You Thru The Night". Yoko was in the audience, feeling "choked" because "I thought, 'Oh, he looks so lonely out there.'"

John told Andy Peebles: "I didn't know she was in the audience. I couldn't have gone on if I'd known she was there. Came offstage and there she was, you know, and we looked at each other. Oh-oh, like the Indica Gallery scene again..."

John didn't move back in immediately. He and Yoko spent Christmas apart, and in January 1975 he went into the studio with David Bowie, recording "Across The Universe" and "Fame", which the two stars co-wrote. At the end of the month, he visited Yoko at the Dakota to talk about a smoking cure she'd heard about. And he stayed.

Lennon: "It was like I'd never left. I realised that this was where I belonged. I think we both knew we'd get back together again sooner or later, and that's why we never bothered with divorce. I'm just glad she let me back in again. It was like going out for a drink, but it took me a year to get it."

He never did give up the cigarettes.

SHORTLY AFTER THEIR reconciliation, Yoko discovered that she was expecting a baby after three miscarriages – the first commemorated on *Life With The Lions*.

Asked about her pregnancy, Yoko tells *Uncut*: "I didn't know what to do, really. My initial instinct was to leave it to John. We came back together after a big separation so with the pregnancy – I would have gone either way. It may be a horrible thing to say. I just wanted to make sure that John was ready for it."

And was he? "Oh – 'Of course we're going to have it!' He was totally thrilled."

At the age of 42, Yoko gave birth to Sean Taro Ono Lennon on October 9 – John's birthday. The proud father declared, "I feel higher than the Empire State Building," and enlisted Elton John as godfather.

Then they retreated behind the Gothic façade of the Dakota Building for the best part of five years. There were occasional public appearances – and a storm of publicity on July 27, 1976 when John finally won his years-long immigration battle by receiving his Green Card (which was actually blue).

"One for both, both for each other": John and Yoko Ono pose at the foot of a stone staircase, December 1968

SUSAN WOOD/GETTY IMAGES

He enthused: "The main thing is that I can travel now. Until today, my attorney wouldn't even let me go to Hawaii for a vacation in case I couldn't get back. Whenever I flew to Los Angeles, I was paranoid in case the plane was diverted to Toronto on the way... If I had lived 2,000 years ago, I would have wanted to live in Rome. New York is the Rome of today. Now I'm going home to crack open a teabag and start looking at some travel catalogues."

John and Yoko went to an ice-cream parlour. In their routine lives, no fanfare accompanied their morning strolls to La Café Fortuna to drink coffee and smoke, or their visits to the shops and restaurants of Manhattan. They had stepped out of the limelight, although even this would be controversial owing to their reversal of traditional roles, with John rearing Sean while Yoko ran their business from the ground-floor office, Studio One.

This was John's "house-husband" period. The Lennons no longer wanted to entrust their financial affairs to an outsider. Yoko had developed a shrewd business acumen and negotiating skill from sitting in on any number of high-powered Beatles meetings, and John therefore opted to take on the daily domestic responsibilities, nurturing and photographing Sean, baking bread and cooking the family meals.

Lennon told Andy Peebles: "Somebody has to take care of business... and there's no way I can do it. I don't have that talent. So she had to do it. She has the talent to do it. And so I had to contribute something... so what am I supposed to do? So I had the sort of early relationship with Sean... and it was fantastic... I looked on [*my role*] as a discipline, an absolute discipline... Through that I got into a whole other new world..."

He also said: "It was quite an experience, and I appreciated what women have done for me all my life. I'd never even thought about it."

Paul McCartney has confirmed that in phone calls with Lennon, they would talk about children and bread-making – and John sent photographs of his first loaf to his friends.

Some authors have contradicted the Lennons' account of this period, including Frederic Seaman, the assistant who repaid his employers by stealing John's diaries immediately after he died. (The diaries have since been returned to Yoko and locked away.) In these portrayals, John was said to be lazing in bed, stoned and idly flicking through the TV channels while servants catered to his every whim. Yoko was painted, once again, as a "Dragon Lady", driven by dollars, glacially indifferent to her husband and son.

She was, it was alleged, more interested in the dairy cows and the properties she had bought than in the rhythm of life going on above her in the top floor of the Dakota.

The woman who has safeguarded the Lennon fortune has also been portrayed as something of a flake, making crucial business decisions at the turn of a card or an astrological prediction. And she's also been accused of inventing "directional" advice, where she would send a naïve John Lennon off on journeys of specific lengths and in "preordained" directions for his own well-being. Memorably, he manned a boat to Bermuda over stormy seas in June 1980, to be joined by Sean and Frederic Seaman after a few days.

What do you say about the allegations that John spent five years in bed, flipping the remote control and smoking reefers?

Yoko: "He wasn't like that. Of course he was unwinding, just as all The Beatles, I'm sure, they were unwinding from their big world trip. It was a magical but exhausting thing that they went through, and the world benefited. It's very hard for them to create a new life after that, I'm sure. He was doing the same thing."

How about the allegations that you spontaneously advised him to travel here and there, just to get him out of the Dakota?

"You see, since John and I became a partnership – we started to have a partnership instead of him being partners with the other three – the responsibility was dropped in my lap to make his life easier and enjoyable, in a way. When he says he wants to do this or that, I would just check the way it could be done.

"He always wanted to sail, like most Englishmen do, I understand. I said, 'Well, you always wanted to do it – you should.' Then I would check."

That was the famous trip. "He went to Bermuda from Long Island." So you didn't just wake up in the morning and decide to send him 7,000 miles north-east or whatever?

"[*Graciously*] No. He would not have gone along with that. The world forgets the fact that he was a very strong-willed person. He was wise enough to maybe take my advice on how to travel – but he wanted to travel."

John was devoted to Sean. And he had started seeing Julian again. Having missed most of Julian's first years during Beatlemania, and having seen little of him since the divorce from Cynthia, he was trying to make up for lost time. At the age of 11, Julian spent some time with John and May Pang, first in New York (where he played drums on the *Walls And Bridges* track "Ya Ya") and then in Florida in December 1974, when they visited Disneyworld. After returning to Yoko, John kept in touch with Julian by phone, and invited him over to visit in the school holidays.

Julian later said of his father, "He was like a real dad, you know? I mean, he was the boss. He got heavy on occasion, so I didn't shoot my mouth off a hell of a lot. I was very quiet. We used to sit down with guitars and mess around, playing old blues and rock."

He also stated: "He advised me on how to cope with problems and what to do as I grow up. He's a very important figure in my life."

Julian described his visits to New York: "We go out quite a lot together, round some of the art galleries or to his house at Long Island. When we stay in, we have musical jam sessions together, singing our latest songs to each other, or talking about art." However, his feelings about Yoko were more complicated.

How would you describe your relationship with Julian?

Yoko: "Julian was, from the

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THE BALLAD OF... – THE FINAL VERSE

How would John have dealt with today's world?

YOKO HAS OFTEN ventured that if John was still with us, he would be making music and probably listening to rap. He would still be driven to communicate with the world, and he would be doing it via the internet.

But in the wake of 9/11, with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and more, would John and Yoko have resumed a physical role in the peace movement? Would they be holding bed-ins, sending acorns to political leaders or mounting the kind of opposition that would have the establishment once more tapping their phones and tracking their every trip to the coffee shop?

"I don't know if we would be out campaigning or not. I feel that this time around, it has to be more than peace marches... It's definitely important – I was in the peace marches, too – but, you see, that's not enough now.

"Let's say that there's another very strong media that's open to us, which is the computer. The internet covers the whole world. Now we really have the Global Village, and we have that awareness, and we have to use that as well to create a power base, horizontally and internationally. Power of the people is very important."

Describing her reactions to 9/11, Yoko says: "The thing that I immediately thought of is the Second World War, which was a shock, and John's death. On a physical level, my body was not shaking like when John died – it was a much more incredible trauma. [*People who saw the World Trade Center obliterated said*] their bodies were shaking, and mine didn't. Of course, on a mental level, I immediately thought of the widows of 9/11, because I related to them."

"He was unwinding, just as all The Beatles, I'm sure. It was a magical but exhausting trip they went through"

ZUMA PRESS, INC./ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

beginning, a very attractive little boy, extremely sensitive and intelligent. I think this whole thing about stepmother, which is an ugly word, first of all... it's really not like Hansel and Gretel to me.

"Now, the modern stepmother, and there are many of them because there were many divorces in the '60s – it was like a norm... stepmothers try very hard to make it OK for the children. For children, it's very, very difficult. It was extremely difficult for Julian.

"Julian and I tried to be friends. Of course, if he's too friendly with me, then I think that it hurts his other relatives. He was very loyal to his mother. That was the first thing that was in his mind. She was feeling, I think, very hurt about the situation. He shared that anger, probably.

"He wasn't angry with me. He was very nice. All through his growing up, I felt we were having a fairly good relationship. It must have been more difficult for him... So that if he prefers not to visit me so much, then I understand."

Yoko has often been portrayed as a cold and distant mother to Sean – but to meet Sean himself is to learn the opposite. When *Uncut* last bumped into him, he smiled broadly at the mention of his mother's name, enthusing, "Isn't she great?"

Yoko herself contends that far from paying him too little attention over the years, she sometimes paid too much.

"Sean is the apple in my eye," she twinkles. "I think that just as any teenager, he was almost resentful that the mother is always getting in touch with him. 'You're calling me again!' You know, when you're trying to be independent – 'You don't have to call, I'm fine.' That's normal for any child. Now he's 27, he's starting to calm down about it. He calls me, too! He's a very good friend."

Sean's band IMA played with Yoko when she went on tour in 1996 to promote her *Rising* album, and he remains a huge encouragement to her new career in the dance world.

Yoko has also, finally, been happily reunited with Kyoko. In a truly extraordinary turn of events, Kyoko phoned out of the blue to tell her mother that she had a granddaughter, and all three came face to face in January 2001. Yoko was 67, Kyoko 37 and Emi three.

Says Yoko of Kyoko: "It's a very good relationship. We're friends. I'm just very thankful that she's so independent and intelligent."

IN BERMUDA, JOHN started writing again, liaising over the phone with Yoko, who was also writing in New York. One phone call wasn't quite so happy.

Lennon told Andy Peebles: "I called her, you know, and I couldn't get through. Can you imagine it? She was so busy with so many calls... I got really mad, and I wrote this song in the heat of passion as it were..."

That song was "I'm Losing You". For the most part, however, John's contributions to his last album, *Double Fantasy*, talk of a new beginning, and of a great love for his family, with some of the regrets that entailed. And it was in this spirit of rebirth that the Lennons went into the Hit Factory, with producer Jack Douglas, in August 1980.

Was everything really wonderful again for John and Yoko?

Yoko: "When we came back together again, it was quite thrilling, of course. And when we finally decided we're going to record, it was a very thrilling time for us, and a lot of love songs came out of us, too. But when you listen to the record, you'll notice it's not all just lovey-dovey. It was really telling the truth."

Was it easy, working with him?

"John was extremely co-operative and very helpful."

He wasn't before?

"He was in a way, but not this way. It was like, for a Beatle to say, 'OK, we can record Yoko's song' – it is a big step, and also he had to try to convince the other musicians. They would do anything that John says, but at the same time, he didn't want to sound like he's all soggy about it – 'OK, we're just doing one from Yoko on it.' With *Double Fantasy*, he was really very astute but also helpful. John was so happy that he was recording again – that was my suggestion – that he kept saying, 'Thank you, thank you, that's so great.' And I felt very good about it, too."

This is confirmed by *Double Fantasy* guitarist Earl Slick. He tells *Uncut*: "John and Yoko were very happy together. The way they were acting, you would think you were at their home instead of the studio. It was pretty informal. They were good together. It was funny. He [*John*] was excited about everything all the time. Every song that we did, the idea of putting a new record out, the idea of touring – everything he talked about was definitely with a tone of excitement.

"It was a very relaxed, fun experience. For the most part, when it came to Yoko's stuff, she was hands-on and there, and when it came to John's stuff, she pretty much left him to his own devices. It was almost like making two albums at the same time. I thought it was fun."

Yoko hired a skywriter. In the clear blue sky on October 9, her message could be clearly seen: "Happy birthday John and Sean – Love Yoko." John was 40. Sean was five. And then, on October 29, 1980 – five days after the release of the comeback single "(Just Like) Starting Over" – the unemployed and mentally disturbed Mark Chapman flew from Honolulu to New York carrying an unloaded handgun.

Chapman had become obsessed with the idea of himself as Holden Caulfield, the central character in JD Salinger's *The Catcher In The Rye*. He had also developed a pathological anger towards John Lennon after reading *John Lennon: One Day At A Time* – a memoir written by a former employee, Anthony Fawcett. Chapman suddenly saw the rich and powerful Lennon as a phoney, and felt a huge wave of personal betrayal by the Beatle he had once believed in. Stoking Chapman's anger was the fact that his great hero, Todd Rundgren, had lambasted Lennon in *Melody Maker* back in September 1974, calling him "a fucking idiot" and an attention-seeker: in short, a phoney.

In midnight rants and pleas to Satan for help and strength, Chapman vowed to kill Lennon. He was Holden Caulfield, and he would take his crusade against hypocrisy one step further than the character in the book: he would kill John Lennon, who had become, to Chapman, symbolic of a cruel and uncaring world.

From October 29 to November 12, he hung around outside the Dakota, breaking to fly to Georgia where his friend Dana Reeves – a sheriff's deputy in Henry County – gave him five Smith & Wesson bullets, believing the gun was for Chapman's protection. He didn't see John.

Chapman phoned his wife Gloria and told her that he had intended to shoot Lennon, but that her love had saved him: he was coming home. Then, on Saturday December 6, Chapman returned to New York.

YOKO RELEASED A statement on December 9, the day after the murder: "There is no funeral for John. Later in the week, we will set the time for a silent vigil to pray for his soul. We invite you to participate from wherever you are at the time. We thank you for the many flowers sent to John. But in the future, instead of flowers, please consider sending donations in his name to the Spirit Foundation Inc, John's personal charitable foundation. He would have appreciated

"I TOLD YOU SO, YOKO..."

"Walking On Thin Ice" gave Yoko her first No 1 single, 22 years after John predicted it...

YOKO ONO SCORED her first No 1 single as a solo artist at the age of 70 in May 2003 when "Walking On Thin Ice" – the recording she was working on with John the night he was murdered – topped the US dance chart. The track – which was remixed by the Pet Shop Boys, Danny Tenaglia, Felix Da Housecat and Peter Rauhofer – excited John so much that he enthused: "This is your first No 1, Yoko."

She told *Uncut*: "The reason I remember him saying it is because it was taped. The tape was still running. I said, 'Well, OK, it's so sweet to say that.' He would often say, 'This is brilliant,' or, 'That's whatever.' But when it didn't [*go to No 1*], I thought, 'Oh, John, you were wrong.'"

So now he's out there saying, "I told you so!"

"Exactly. He's laughing. But also, you know, timing is something that you never really think of."

You did have to wait 23 years...

"Yes! It's like that saying, don't watch boiling water. I wasn't watching. That's why it finally came. Otherwise, it would have taken another hundred years. It's an amazing feeling. And also my son [*Sean*] is very glad.

"I still pinch myself, because it would have been a very different thing to reach my 70th birthday without anything. This was just a nice bonus."

MATTHEW PEYTON/GETTY IMAGES

Fans mark the first anniversary of John's death with a vigil outside the Dakota Building, NYC, December 8, 1981

it very much. John loved and prayed for the human race. Please pray the same for him. Love, Yoko and Sean."

She issued another message the next day, describing how she had taken Sean to the spot where John fell, and announcing a 10-minute silent vigil. Later, at 2pm on December 10, Lennon was cremated at Ferncliff Crematorium in Hartsdale, Westchester County.

On December 14, at the end of the worldwide vigil, Yoko sent out a third statement: "Bless you for your tears and prayers. I saw John smiling in the sky. I saw sorrow changing into clarity. I saw all of us becoming one mind. Thank you. Love, Yoko."

"After John, music was the thing that kept me going," says Yoko in 2003. "The support of the public helped. I'm very thankful for that."

She spent hours alone in the weeks after the murder.

"I was in a funk. Much time was spent in bed resting, but not always in bed. I did what I had to as well. I would be in bed and then I would go out to the studio to finish 'Walking On Thin Ice'. It was supposed to be a dance kind of thing. After John's passing, people told me, 'Walking On Thin Ice', they're playing it in the clubs!"

She wrote in the sleevenotes: "Getting this together after what happened was hard. But I knew John would not rest his mind if I hadn't. I hope you like it, John. I did my best."

Yoko followed with the controversial *Season Of Glass*, released June 1981. A heartbreaking album, it features songs about the murder, complete with sounds of gunfire, and a sleeve photograph of John's bloodstained glasses.

Earl Slick, who played on the sessions, tells *Uncut*: "She got a lot of flak – the whole idea that she was going on to make a record. People had something to say about that, to which I answered, 'What the fuck are you supposed to do?' I think she needed to do it. You could see that there were times when she was down, a little morose. I think she was in shock the whole time. It was only three or four months after the fact."

"After John, music was the thing that kept me going. The support of the public helped. I'm very thankful for that"

There were more albums through the 1980s, but it wasn't until the next decade that Yoko began to receive an unexpected but growing respect for her music. With the *Rising* album, followed by a selection of *Rising* remixes, she won some unusually positive reviews.

And in the new millennium, in a remarkable turnaround, the music she had made some 20 years earlier was seized upon by contemporary musicians and updated.

With "Open Your Box", remixed by The Orange Factory and released in June 2002, with "Kiss Kiss Kiss" remixed by Superchumbo, and with the latest remixes of "Walking On Thin Ice" hitting No 1, Yoko has now become the darling of dance.

She was, as Lennon always insisted, ahead of her time. And the "Dragon Lady" of yesterday has, against all the odds, become an inspirational figure today.

Does love survive death?

"Oh, yeah, sure."

You've said that John is still around.

"Yeah, I feel that."

How does he make himself known to you?

"Well, I mean, that's very private..."

Wasn't there an occasion when he saved your life?

"Oh yes, it was in San Francisco, and I got a message from him, actually, because there was nobody else... It wasn't my brain thinking about it. 'Quick,' you know, 'Get bodyguards and all that and protect Sean', which I did. Two or three days later, several cops came in suddenly and said, 'Excuse me, Mrs Lennon, but there's a sniper out there and you have to be very careful.' This was in 1982.

"The sniper, he shot out from the window just to test his gun. Nobody's going to do something crazy like that. I think John was trying to tell the world, 'This guy's crazy and here he is – arrest him.' And the cops went to his apartment and they arrested him."

How do you recover from the murder of your husband?

"Part of me really hasn't recovered, and that's why I feel so badly for the widows and the children of 9/11, the family that's left, because it's something that you feel forever in a way, and you just digest it, of course.

"Sort of, in appearance you could look very well adjusted maybe, but inside it's a different story."

GETTY IMAGES/BETTMANN

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

Immersive and personal reissues deliver a guided tour behind the curtain of Lennon's truth-hunting classics. The story of what's been released so far. BY PETER WATTS

RELEASE DATE

2018-2020

JOHN LENNON'S LEGACY is fiercely protected, guided and finessed by Yoko Ono and Sean Lennon, the two people best placed to present his image and music to different generations. It helps that both are musicians, activists and artists, Yoko especially, with a very singular and powerful vision of how things should be done. It was Yoko who conceived the *Ultimate Collection* series, and Sean who helped to execute it.

Yoko's idea was to offer a deep dive into every studio album through remastered and remixed versions of the original album accompanied by a panoramic range of outtakes and raw mixes. The series started with *Imagine* and will be followed by *Plastic Ono Band*. In between, to mark Lennon's 80th birthday, came *Gimme Some Truth*, a career-encompassing 36-track compilation featuring new "Ultimate" mixes by Paul Hicks, who remixed *Imagine* and *Plastic Ono Band* and has worked on various Beatles projects over the years.

The *Imagine* box has been acclaimed as one of the most impressively realised reissues to hit the shelves. It includes the original album and contemporary singles "Power To The People", "Happy Xmas (War Is Over)" and "God Save Oz" (plus B-sides) followed by a wealth of additional material. The second disc has "Element" mixes (songs with certain aspects isolated, such as the strings or the vocals) as well as numerous demos and alternative versions. A third disc has the "Raw Studio" mixes – that is the recordings before Phil Spector got stuck in. And the fourth disc has the "Evolution" mixes, fascinating documentary montages that chart the development of each individual song through interviews and performance, following them from demo to finished recording. There's also a blu-ray that contains the album, outtakes and raw mixes, a remastered Quadrosonic mix and a new 5.1 surround sound mix plus even more Elements and Evolution tracks. The Raw Studio Mixes were then given a standalone vinyl release for 2019 Record Store Day.

Sound quality throughout is CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKS

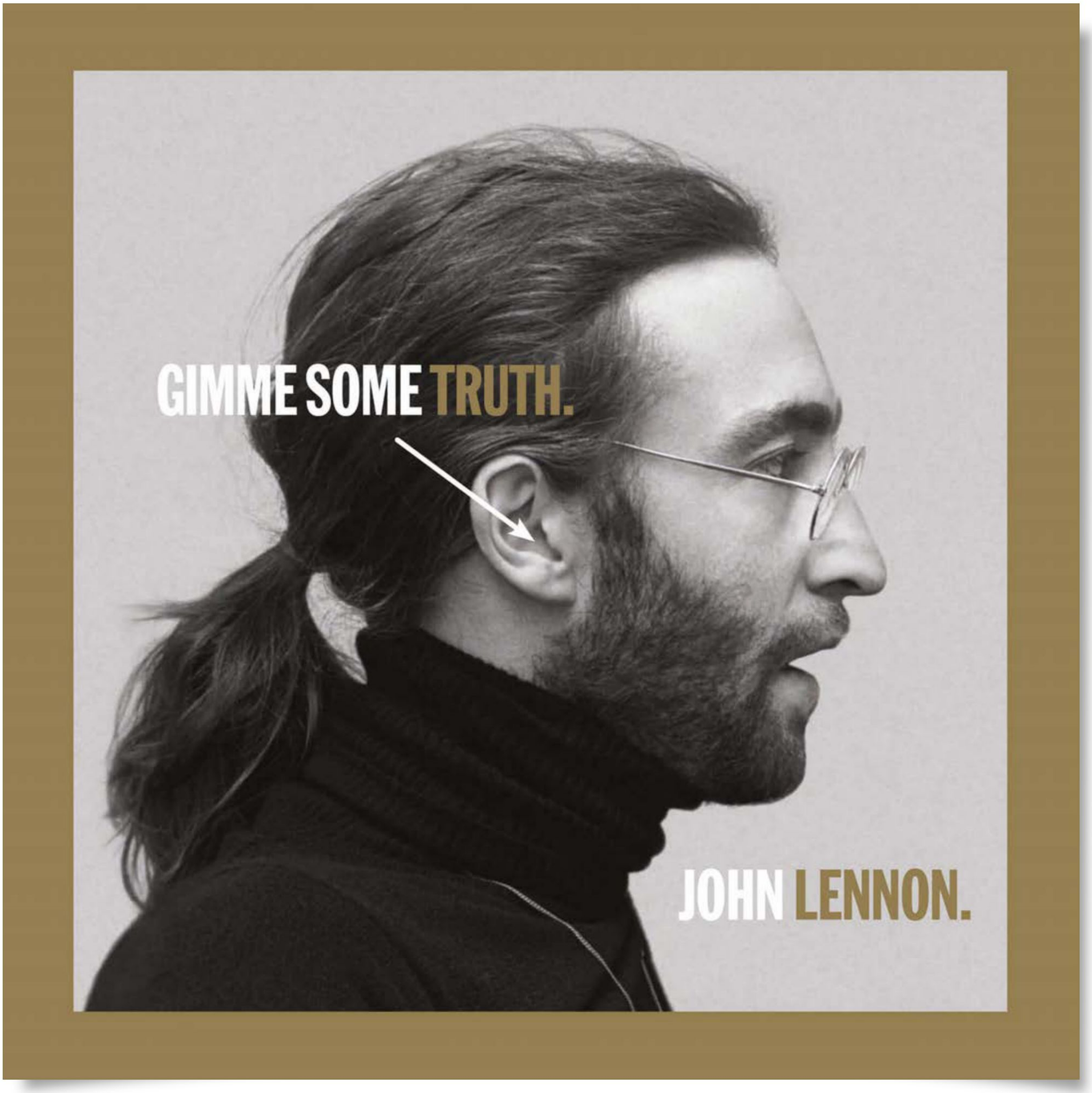
GIMME SOME TRUTH

Disc 1 (Ultimate Mixes)

1 | Instant Karma! (We All Shine On)
2 | Cold Turkey
3 | Working Class Hero
4 | Isolation
5 | Love
6 | God
7 | Power To The People
8 | Imagine
9 | Jealous Guy
10 | Gimme Some Truth
11 | Oh My Love
12 | How Do You Sleep?
13 | Oh Yoko!
14 | Angela
15 | Come Together (live)
16 | Mind Games
17 | Out The Blue
18 | I Know (I Know)

Disc 2 (Ultimate Mixes)

1 | Whatever Gets You Thru The Night
2 | Bless You
3 | #9 Dream
4 | Steel And Glass
5 | Stand By Me
6 | Angel Baby
7 | (Just Like) Starting Over
8 | I'm Losing You
9 | Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy)
10 | Watching The Wheels
11 | Woman
12 | Dear Yoko
13 | Every Man Has A Woman Who Loves Him
14 | Nobody Told Me
15 | I'm Stepping Out
16 | Grow Old With Me
17 | Happy Xmas (War Is Over)
18 | Give Peace A Chance


GIMME SOME TRUTH.
JOHN LENNON.

imagine
john
lennon

imagine
john
lennon
blu-ray 1
Blu-ray Disc
1080p 23.98 : Aspect Ratio 16:9 : All Regions
Exempt from classification
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Don't believe in MBE: John and Yoko, November 26, 1969

outstanding, with – per Ono's wishes – particular emphasis going to Lennon's voice. Klaus Voormann's bass also gets some general beefing up, giving rockier songs like "I Don't Wanna Be A Soldier Mama" and "How Do You Sleep?" a bit more oomph. This focus on the vocals is one of the main themes of the series, and the recordings on *Gimme Some Truth* benefit from the renewed clarity of Lennon's voice.

The preponderance of material on the *Imagine Ultimate Collection* allows the listener to completely immerse themselves in the album. Some of the outtakes are terrific value, including the earliest demos of "Imagine" and "Oh Yoko!", a terrific run through of "How Do You Sleep?", with Lennon guiding the band through the arrangement, and strong alternative versions of "Crippled Inside" and "I Don't Wanna Be A Soldier Mama".

The "Raw" mixes are particularly interesting in showing what Spector did to the basic backing tracks. Sound apart, there aren't too many major differences in arrangements – the significantly longer outro to "Oh Yoko!" being the main exception. Some tracks – "Gimme Some Truth" and "I Don't Wanna be A Solder Mama" – are improved by the rougher feel which gives *Imagine* a clearer link back to *Plastic Ono Band*. Otherwise they generally lack the rich and haunting quality Spector brought to the album. Lennon worried that Spector was burying his vocal but the "Raw" mixes end up lessening the overall impact and, ultimately, dulling the message.

That message is the key element of *Gimme Some Truth*. When the idea of releasing a new Lennon compilation was floated, Sean Ono Lennon seized on "truth" as the most relevant topic for the contemporary political environment. That helped set the tone for the rest of the compilation, meaning songs like "Angela" and "Watching The Wheels" made the cut alongside the core 15-20 songs which need to feature on any Lennon best of. The guiding theme meant designer Jonathan Barnbrook could focus on the political side of Lennon through the packaging, which was done in close consultation with Sean Ono Lennon and Simon Hilton, longtime Lennon archivist who created the books accompanying the *Imagine* and the forthcoming *Plastic Ono Band* reissues.

Sonically, the *Gimme Some Truth* mixes adhere to the principles established by *Imagine: The Ultimate Collection*, with Lennon's vocals pushed right to the front of the mix. The new version of "Come Together" from the 1972 Madison Square Garden concert might offer the best single example of how much better this can sound – it gives the album an internal cohesion while also connecting it to the other reissue packages.

Additional consistency comes from Sean's decision to have the remixes completed using vintage analogue plates, reverbs and outboard effects at Henson Recording Studios in LA and then remastering the album on analogue at Abbey Road. That means that a disparate collection of songs that were recorded at a variety of studios over more than a decade have something close to a unifying sonic flavour. It particularly strengthens the middle section of songs from the *Mind Games/Walls And Bridges/ Rock'n'Roll* era.

The compilation seeks to re-emphasise Lennon as an activist, still relevant in the era of Trump and BLM (the latter surely accounts for the selection of "Angela"), but through song selection and packaging the other sides of Lennon are also covered, particularly his love for Yoko and Sean – and, in this process, theirs for him. Compilations usually feel as if they have been bolted together by committee but this is a surprisingly personal collection. It displays an intimate and invested touch that has gone a long way with the reissue series so far.

TRACKS

IMAGINE – THE ULTIMATE EDITION: 6-DISC SUPER DELUXE EDITION

Disc: 1
Remixed Stereo Album, Singles & Extras

Disc: 2
Elements Mixes
1 | **Imagine** (strings only)
2 | **Jealous Guy** (piano, bass & drums)
3 | **Oh My Love** (vocals only)
4 | **How?** (strings only)
Album Outtakes
5 | **Imagine** (demo)
6 | **Imagine** (take 1)
7 | **Crippled Inside** (take 3)
8 | **Crippled Inside** (take 6 – alt guitar solo)
9 | **Jealous Guy** (take 9)
10 | **It's So Hard** (take 6)
11 | **I Don't Wanna Be A Soldier Mama I Don't Wanna Die** (take 11)
12 | **Gimme Some Truth** (take 4)
13 | **Oh My Love** (take 6)
14 | **How Do You Sleep?** (takes 1 & 2)
15 | **How?** (take 31)
16 | **Oh Yoko!** (Bahamas 1969)

Singles Outtakes
17 | **Power To The People** (take 7)
18 | **God Save Us** (demo)
19 | **Do The Oz** (take 3)
20 | **Happy Xmas (War Is Over)** (alt mix)

Disc: 3
Extended Album Tracks and Raw
1 | **Imagine** (take 10)
2 | **Crippled Inside** (take 6)
3 | **Jealous Guy** (take 29)
4 | **It's So Hard** (take 11)
5 | **I Don't Wanna Be A Soldier Mama I Don't Wanna Die**
6 | **Gimme Some Truth** (take 4 – extended)
7 | **Oh My Love** (take 20)
8 | **How Do You Sleep?** (take 11 – extended)
9 | **How?** (take 40)
10 | **Oh Yoko!** (take 1 extended)

Outtakes Live
11 | **Imagine** (take 1)
12 | **Jealous Guy** (take 11)
13 | **I Don't Wanna Be A Soldier Mama I Don't Wanna Die** (take 21)
14 | **How Do You Sleep?** (take 1)
15 | **How Do You Sleep?** (takes 5 & 6)

Disc: 4
Evolution (from demo to final mix)
1 | **Imagine**
2 | **Crippled Inside**
3 | **Jealous Guy**
4 | **It's So Hard**
5 | **I Don't Wanna Be A Soldier Mama I Don't Wanna Die**
6 | **Gimme Some Truth**
7 | **Oh My Love**
8 | **How Do You Sleep?**
9 | **How?**
10 | **Oh Yoko!**

Disc 5 – Blu-ray audio
Disc 1
Remixed Stereo Album, Singles, Extras, 5.1., Quadrasonic & Outtakes

Blu-ray Disc 1 – Imagine – The Ultimate Mixes
Remixed Stereo Album, Singles, Extras & Outtakes
Imagine – The Album
Singles & Extras
The Outtakes

The Quadrasonic Mixes
Original 1971 Quadsonic Album Remastered

Blu-ray Disc 2 – In The Studio and Deeper Listening
The Raw Studio Mixes – Extended Album Versions – Live
The Raw Studio Mixes – Outtakes – Live

The Elements Mixes From the Master Multitracks
Mixes from elements of the original multitracks that demonstrate some of the instrumentations from 'behind the scenes'

The Evolution Documentary
New Mix in Mono 24-96

PICTURELUX / THE HOLLYWOOD ARCHIVE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Q&A "IT'S MUCH MORE CONTEMPORARY"

Lennon's archive team on bringing his truth to the age of Spotify

SIMON HILTON (compilation producer and production manager): Yoko set up the *Ultimate Collection* as a series of boxsets that explore each album, the ultimate exploration of each album that is really faithful to the originals. We didn't anticipate a best of, but when the 80th came up, Universal suggested it and that seemed a fantastic idea.

PAUL HICKS (engineer and remixer): Our main objective is to get more clarity out of them but it has to remain authentic to the originals. The focus is on John, that is Yoko's thing, and he put so much emotion into those songs. One thing we use a lot in early discussion is the word timeless – that's what we are going for – but we also try to get more low end. A younger audience using a Spotify playlist want things with a similar frequency range.

HILTON: If you listen to them side by side with the old versions you will realise they have this great sonic quality but also the nostalgia of how you remember them sounding. Paul manages to retain that sense of the lightning in the bottle, but the voice is much more present. The big challenge is that it was originally all mixed together in a big mush and is a bit muffled, so Paul works to bring out all the detail. On *Imagine* Paul mixed all the strings on stereo rather than mono – that was a Yoko idea.

HICKS: There are a few cases where we went further. On the second disc of *Gimme Some Truth* we could get a bit more creative with the mixes and there were a few places where we did some subtle arrangement stuff. So "Woman" has four synths all doing the same thing and we did a little bit of finessing with those. You have to be very respectful of the material but you can't be afraid to play with it. It's about that fine line.

SAM GANNON (engineer): My role is to prep the material for Paul, doing the technical work so he can be creative. I also did the Evolution mixes for *Imagine*. That is a lot of listening and editing, working out what to use and what to throw away. You end with something that is three times longer than it has to be, so you have to cut even more.

HILTON: Sometimes these magnetic tapes have print-through – the magnetism of the reel prints through to the next wind of the reel, like a double exposure on film. You have to clean that digitally.

HICKS: When we opened up these mixes, we also noticed a lot of clicks and pops.

SIMON: It's like when you tidy the house and start to focus on increasingly minute pieces of dust. You get down to the tiny grains, and there is still more. So these guys are cleaning and polishing but they have to retain enough to give it atmosphere.

HICKS: We are not de-noising – that's a very key thing.

HILTON: Sean was very keen on *Gimme Some Truth* as the title for the compilation. He felt that was the most applicable to the present day. There have been lots of best of comps for John and it's a real challenge to find a way to make this one great. We knew we could do ultimate mixes so it would be sonically upgraded and it was Sean's idea to do all the effects and finishing on analogue so they have that authentic feel. The other important thing was to have 36 great songs but not exactly the same as the ones that have been used before. There are 18 tracks that have to be on every greatest hits and then the other 18 are up for debate – those were often chosen because they made for really interesting musical choices or because of emotional attachment to a song.

HICKS: When you are dealing with a single album you are totally immersed in the time when it was released. With a compilation, it's more about making it sound as good as possible, so just get stuck in. It encourages you to be a bit bolder. Because of lockdown, we did a lot on Zoom and that made it a lot easier to get instant feedback.

HILTON: We set up a technologically identical set-up here in the UK to Paul's in LA. Identical speakers, headphones, interfaces, plug-ins, software and hardware, so we all knew we were listening to the same thing.

HICKS: We usually remaster at Abbey Road but we had to shift it to Henson in LA, where they have the original plates and vintage gear.

HILTON. Henson used to be A&M where John recorded some of *Rock'n'Roll*. It was bought by Jim Henson. We block-booked it, then locked Paul in there for a month with Kermit.

JONATHAN BARNBROOK (designer): There are three main images that we used throughout the packaging: an image from the bed-in, a montage from a recording session of the *Imagine* album, and a shot from the day John Lennon handed back his MBE, which we used for the front cover. Sean really loved that photo. He had strong ideas about how his dad should be presented to the world. It's much more contemporary. He felt there needed to be, especially in these difficult times, a reassessment of John Lennon. He was an activist and the images are very clearly about that.

HILTON: It's impossible to avoid noticing how much he looks like Sean on the cover.

BARNBROOK: There is an arrow on the front cover going into John Lennon's ear and his name is coming out of his mouth. It's a very simple device. The title also has a full stop, as if it's a statement and the full stop is a theme that goes through the book – all the track titles have a full stop because each song was a statement. John Lennon didn't separate his life from his art, it was all presented as part of being a human being. When it came to the packaging, Sean and I talked about the *Wedding Album*. This isn't at that level but we wanted to show we understood the music and could represent it in a way that made it relevant for a contemporary audience.

> "John Lennon didn't separate his life from his art, it was all presented as part of being a human being"

HILTON: Sean was very keen on looking for new ways of representing John and this cover image is slightly unexpected. Jonathan made it all a little more agitated, adding metallic flourishes.

BARNBROOK: We used gold on the cover and that reappeared in different ways throughout the images and text. It represents his spiritual sense and this idea of what lies underneath his overall beliefs. We also used the gold to enhance John Lennon and the Queen's name on the letter he sent when he returned the MBE, which was included in the package as a facsimile. Handing backing that sort of award is no small task, but he did it and he did it with humour. That's a hallmark of John Lennon – dealing with heavy subjects with wit, and it can be inspiring for activists today as it showed that this is a way you can live your life.

UNCUT
JANUARY 2008

All You Need Is John...

The 30 Greatest Lennon Songs

...as chosen by his friends, lovers and superstar followers, including Liam Gallagher, Roger Daltrey, John Lydon, Brian Wilson, Paul Weller, Mick Jagger and Neil Young

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There's a place: Lennon outside a public loo on Broadwick Street in London's Soho, filming the *Not Only... But Also Christmas Special*, starring Peter Cook and Dudley Moore, November 27, 1966

ICELAND, OCTOBER 9, 2007. Yoko Ono is in Reykjavik to unveil a tribute to John Lennon, the Imagine Peace Tower, on what would have been her husband's 67th birthday. Located on nearby Videy Island, the 'tower' consists of nine beams of light, rising up from a white wishing well that's inscribed with the words "Imagine Peace" in 24 languages. Also attending the ceremony are Olivia and Dhani Harrison, Sean Lennon and his half-sister, Kyoko, and Ringo who, clearly feeling the bitter cold, suggests Yoko "have the next one in the Caribbean". The ceremony climaxes with the crowd leaving the site to the strains of Lennon's "Give Peace A Chance".

We meet Yoko the night before the ceremony, in the grand presidential suite of her hotel, where despite suffering from extreme nerves she chats enthusiastically about John's songwriting, particularly his formidable collection of peace songs.

"In 1965, I put the light house down as part of the sales list in my book, *Grapefruit*," she begins, explaining the origins of the Imagine Peace Tower as part of a conceptual art show. "In 1966, I put some prisms in the Indica Gallery as part of the light house. I met John there, and in 1967, he invited me to his house, Kenwood, to talk about it. It was funny: the light house was conceptual and it took John to visualise it. Now it's a reality.

"About three years ago, I had to think about what to do with all the wishes that people tied to the wish trees at my museum shows. We have more than a million wishes. I thought, 'I need a tower.' Then I thought, 'That should be John's light tower.' The light stands for empowerment, and for energy and wisdom. The wishes will be buried around the tower in capsules.

"It's called Imagine Peace Tower because the word 'imagine' was a very important word between us. It's very special because of John's song 'Imagine', as well. I was there when he wrote it. We were in Ascot, in our bedroom upstairs. Because we were both artists, we showed each other everything. If I scribbled something, I'd show it to John. He would scribble something and show it to me. That's how he wrote his songs, too. He wasn't one of those writers who'd write from 10 until 12 in the morning. He used to think of an idea when we were in a plane or something. He just writes it down. And at the time he writes it down, he's already got the melody.

"John didn't have a narrow talent. He had all the different emotions he was able to express in his songs. If you want to analyse it, his mum wasn't around, and his dad wasn't around, and he wanted someone to listen to him when he was a little boy. When I went to Liverpool, to his childhood home, I cried, because I saw the little bedroom where it all started.

"'Imagine' is my favourite of John's peace songs. I think he thought just like I do now – world peace is an inevitable thing. What are we going to do? Kill ourselves? We're not that dumb.

"I think 'All You Need Is Love' was the beginning of John's peace writing. You notice that even when he was a Beatle, he wanted to dabble in different things,

Yoko attends to her 'Wish Tree' installation at Liverpool's Bluecoat Gallery in 2008

RON CASE/KEYSTONE/GETTY IMAGES; CARL DE SOUZA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

especially anti-war songs. But The Beatles were so successful, he felt he couldn't.

"'Give Peace A Chance' is basically John's idea. I might have thrown some words in. It happened spontaneously in the hotel room [*Montreal's Queen Elizabeth Hotel, during the 1969 Bed-In*]. I thought it was great. But, you know, it's a political song. When John writes something extremely artistic like 'Scared' [*from Walls And Bridges*], that's a different story. I really admire it, it's fantastic. But with 'Give Peace A Chance', it's very important when you try to communicate on a very wide level you have to choose very simple but powerful words to get the message across.

"Thank you, *Uncut*, for your continuing support of John's work and for playing your part in keeping his spirit alive. It is important that new generations continue to discover John's music and the message behind it. IMAGINE PEACE!"

30 BEAUTIFUL BOY (DARLING BOY)

FROM THE JOHN LENNON & YOKO ONO ALBUM *DOUBLE FANTASY* (NOVEMBER 1980)

Written for son Sean, then aged five, and partially inspired by the writings of French psychologist Émile Coué, "Beautiful Boy" sees Lennon extolling the simple joy of fatherhood.

Liam Gallagher, Oasis: My song "Little James" was inspired by "Beautiful Boy" and "Hey Jude". More "Beautiful Boy". People who've got any soul will realise that there's a day when you go home and put your feet up and cuddle your kids. If anyone slags it off, they've either got no heart or they don't know what the meaning of life is. They just go out and do-do-do-do-do the same thing every day. So fuck them. You can't win with these people. They're going, "You're the wild man of rock, you're this, you don't fucking care," and when you do show a bit of caring, they call you a poof... Originally, I wanted it to be acoustic. Have you heard Lennon's demos? They're dead crackly, and it's just on a guitar, and that's the way I'd like to write music. But if it's gonna go on an Oasis album, it's gotta be big, hasn't it? So then I played it to Noel, he went away with the band and he goes: "What do you think of this?" I went: "It's fucking top."

29 WHATEVER GETS YOU THRU THE NIGHT

FROM THE JOHN LENNON ALBUM *WALLS AND BRIDGES* (OCTOBER 1974); RELEASED AS A SINGLE OCTOBER 1974. HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION: 36

Lennon's first solo US No 1, with Elton John guesting on keyboards. Lennon later joined Elton onstage at Madison Square Garden in November 1974, for what would be his last public performance.

Klaus Voormann, Lennon's bassist: I got a call from John asking me to come to New York to play on his new record. He was getting some friends together – Jim Keltner on drums, Jesse Ed Davis on guitar – so it sounded like a good idea. I think we did the whole of *Walls And Bridges* in two weeks.

We didn't do any rehearsals. John would come in each day with a new song, play it to us and we'd go from there. We never got chord structure or anything like that, but he gave each of us a piece of A4 paper with the words on. We'd make our parts up on the spot and if he liked it, he'd give you a little grin.

He'd be wearing his denims, usually with his cap on, very low-key. He was completely on the level – you could tell he just wanted to be a member of a band again.

We'd start in the afternoon and work through the night, although by the end of the fortnight we'd sometimes start about nine in the evening [*laughs*]. We would only break for food. John would say: "Let's have blintzes!" He loved to the have pancakes with blueberries and cream – or we'd have Chinese, but then get back to work.

This was during his Lost Weekend and it was party time. There was booze, and people heading to the bathroom to sniff stuff. I never saw John drunk in the studio, or stoned, but there was a lot of cocaine around. John would say: "Fancy some nose?" So it was that and a little hot *sake*.

I remember the day we did "Whatever Gets You Thru The Night", John was very excited about it. It's a happy song, but there's a sadness to it. You could tell he was missing Yoko, and he was cutting loose. We've got an expression for it in German – he was painting over his pain.

The recording is way too fast. Elton John wasn't there – he came in and did his overdubs

"'This Boy' is a perfect short love song, but as always with John's songs, there's more to it"

Ian Hart, actor

later – but Arthur Jenkins [*percussionist*] and Bobby Keys [*saxophonist*] were, and as the night wore on, each time it got faster and faster. It ended up almost twice the speed it started out! Bobby was playing all the wrong notes, too, which didn't help! But John was pleased with it – it was all about capturing the feel and atmosphere in one take. Who cares about the speed and a few bum notes, y'know? John was right, of course – it was his first solo No 1 in America.

28 REVOLUTION 9

FROM THE BEATLES ALBUM *THE BEATLES* [*THE WHITE ALBUM*] (NOVEMBER 1968)

Musique concrète-style noise collage, featuring sound clips and tape loops, and The Beatles' longest song. Paul McCartney and George Martin originally lobbied for its exclusion from the album.

Adam Yauch, Beastie Boys: The 'White Album' was a big presence around the house when I was a kid. Every track is ingrained on my brain – proto-metal tracks like "Helter Skelter", folk tracks like "Blackbird", string ballads like "Goodnight", little children's nursery rhymes like "Piggies". And then you get this crazy, avant-garde shit like "Revolution 9" on the last side. I was terrified by it. I used to hide behind the sofa when it came on – the voices shouting, "*Number nine, number nine*", the backwards music, the random noises. I remember crying on more than one occasion. But I suppose it's not too much of a jump to say that "Revolution 9" gave me some understanding of sampling, of looping ideas, of making beats out of random sound, or the relationship between art and music, sound and rhythm.

27 THIS BOY

B-SIDE OF THE BEATLES SINGLE "I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND" (NOVEMBER 1963). HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION: 1

Inspired by Lennon's love of doo-wop and home to The Beatles' first great three-part harmony. An instrumental version appeared on the A Hard Day's Night soundtrack.

Ian Hart, actor who played John Lennon in *Backbeat* and *The Hours And Times*: This song of longing and lost love breaks my heart when I try to sing it. It's a perfect short love song, but as always with John's songs, there's something more to it; the plaintive quality of Lennon's voice in the chorus is enough to make you cry. I've always loved "This Boy" and have various memories of it. They sang it on *Morecambe & Wise*, and *The Ed Sullivan Show* in the States, neither of which I probably saw until I started doing research for *The Hours And Times*.

But it's the use of George Martin's instrumental version in *A Hard Day's Night* that provokes the greatest response in me. Ringo, egged on by Paul's grandad, goes on his lonely journey, feeling like an outcast. It's only a short scene, but the song perfectly matches the rejection and longing Ringo's character feels in the movie.

In a way, I owe my career to John, and a lot more besides. I would never have worked with Ken Loach or Neil Jordan, and I wouldn't have many of the friends I have. "*This boy wants you back again*": cheesy but true.

26 MOTHER

FROM THE ALBUM *JOHN LENNON: PLASTIC ONO BAND* (DECEMBER 1970); RELEASED AS A SINGLE, DECEMBER 1970. HIGHEST US CHART POSITION: 43

Inspired by primal scream therapy, Lennon confronts his abandonment issues head on, delivering a raw, revelatory glimpse of his psyche.

Lee Ranaldo, Sonic Youth: Like Dylan, Lennon's someone who has done so much that your favourite song could change from day to day, depending on where you're at. "Mother" came out of this Janov Scream Therapy, and he was the kind of person who could take things

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John, Paul and George (plus other followers Mia Farrow and Donovan) join the Maharishi in Rishikesh, India in March 1968

that were going on in his personal life and channel them into his musical life. That was impressive to me. It came out in early Beatles songs – like "You've Got To Hide Your Love Away". He was starting to channel things into his songs, and those early solo records, like the vituperative condemnation of Paul in "How Do You Sleep?", he was channelling this stuff directly into his music in this incredible way.

I always loved "Mother" – it's really bold and audacious in the way it ends with the screaming lines of lyrics. It's so emotionally appropriate and so true to who he was and where he was. It never fails to move me.

> **"Like so many of his lyrics, people searched for the hidden meaning, but there was none"** May Pang

25 I'M SO TIRED

FROM THE BEATLES ALBUM *THE BEATLES* [*THE WHITE ALBUM*] (NOVEMBER 1968)

Composed at the Maharishi's retreat in India, and recorded during an all-night session at Abbey Road, Lennon's jaded ode speaks volumes for his boredom at being a Beatle.

Jarvis Cocker: John was my favourite Beatle. When I was a kid I thought I'd like to be like him, 'cos he had glasses. I thought that proves that you can be a pop star and wear glasses.

"I'm So Tired", I'll have that. Lyrically I like the way he calls Sir Walter Raleigh "*such a stupid get*", and the way he manages to get that mundanity into something quite intense. It made me realise that you could actually write songs like that. He's just listing things that have pissed him off and he can't sleep and he doesn't know what to do with himself, 'cos he's fallen in love. Getting all the little detail into it was an inspiration for me. Also, that's one of the ones with the easiest chords. When I bought my *Beatles Complete* guitar book I got discouraged, 'cos they always seemed to have all these sustained ninths and I couldn't play them. Then I realised "I'm So Tired" is quite simple and I managed to master that one.

24 GOD

FROM THE ALBUM *JOHN LENNON/PLASTIC ONO BAND* (DECEMBER 1970)

Bitter attack on idolatry, culminating in a denunciation of the Fabs themselves. "And so, dear friends, you just have to carry on..." is all the optimism Lennon can muster, consigning '60s idealism to the dustbin.

John Leckie, engineer: I can't say I was in awe of Lennon, because at that time The Beatles weren't that hip. I'd done George's album [*All Things Must Pass*], which had so many different musicians that it became a challenge, but it was straightforward with John and Yoko. There were only three people in there and very focused. Yoko was there all the time, offering comments and guidance, and [*co-producer*] Phil Spector.

Spector certainly wasn't the tyrant in the studio. He was sitting back, letting John and Yoko do their thing. I'm not sure he understood it, though. I remember it being a lot of fun. It was Ringo, John and Klaus [*Voorman*] – mates.

I went back into Abbey Road recently and got the old eight-track tapes out. That was fantastic in itself. You forget how many takes and how much experimentation went into that album. It was very conscientiously done, almost matter-of-fact. There's about three days' worth of recordings of "Mother". He tried "God" out on electric guitar first, found it wasn't working and tried it on piano. John would play a song through and through until he came up with the magic take. We'd start recording around six in the evening and often go on until eight in the morning.

23 GIMME SOME TRUTH

TAKEN FROM THE JOHN LENNON ALBUM *IMAGINE* (SEPTEMBER 1971)

A rip-roaring dig at "neurotic, psychotic, pig-headed politicians", "paranoic prima donnas" and indeed anyone else who didn't dig the Ono-Lennon 'Bed-Ins'.

Tony James, Carbon/Silicon: I always loved The Beatles, but I became a real Lennon fan when I first heard *Imagine*. I used to babysit for Neil Aspinall, who was The Beatles' personal assistant. I was saving up for gigs and records by babysitting. He said, "I must play you this album John's just made."

Here was someone talking about something more than just love songs. Years later, Billy [*Idol*] and I used to listen to "Gimme Some Truth". What made it stand out was the lyrical content. We loved the word play – "*No short-haired, yellow-bellied son of Tricky Dicky's gonna Mother Hubbard soft-soap me...*" It was brilliant the way the words alliterated, and this cry of passion...

We covered it in Generation X. When I last saw Primal Scream, they did "Gimme Some Truth" and they did the Generation X version. When I saw

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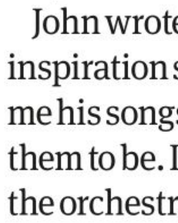
Bobby after the show, he came rushing up and said, "Did you hear 'Gimme Some Truth'? It's the Generation X version!"

22 #9 DREAM

FROM THE JOHN LENNON ALBUM *WALLS AND BRIDGES* (OCTOBER 1974); RELEASED AS A SINGLE, JANUARY 1975. HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION: 23



Inspired by Lennon's fascination with the number nine, this piece of baroque pop has backing vocals from May Pang, Lennon and Yoko's personal assistant who became his lover.

May Pang: John had just produced Harry Nilsson's *Pussy Cats* album, and he'd created a beautiful string arrangement for the opening track, "Many Rivers To Cross". John liked it so much he wanted to use it himself. He literally dreamed the rest of the song, including the words "*Ah! Böwakawa, poussé, poussé*". Like so many of his lyrics, people searched for the hidden meaning, but there was none. [*In the dream*], two women were calling his name, which he figured were me and Yoko. It was his idea to have me sing it. He had to turn the studio lights down because I was shy doing those sultry "*John*"s. When Yoko put together a video for the song in 2005, she included footage of her lip-syncing to my vocal, which is why some people may be confused.

John wrote on his Martin acoustic, whenever inspiration struck, which was often. He'd play me his songs and tell me what he envisioned them to be. In the case of "#9 Dream", he wrote the orchestral arrangements and produced the track in such a way as to lull the listener into his dream. He always had his pen and paper ready to jot something down, even by his bed. One of my expressions at the time was "off the wall", which appeared in "Steel And Glass". I introduced him to beef jerky, which became the title of another song.

He often asked what I thought about a lick or some words, but when he played "Surprise Surprise" [*the song Lennon wrote for May*], I teared up and was speechless. He joked to me, "It's that bad, huh?"

21 JEALOUS GUY

FROM THE JOHN LENNON ALBUM *IMAGINE* (SEPTEMBER 1971)

One of Lennon's most covered songs, this was a public apology to Yoko over his behaviour following The Beatles' split, when his heavy drinking put pressure on their relationship.

Roger Daltrey, The Who: My favourite? It's "Jealous Guy". I don't have to tell you why. But I was listening to his voice the other day, his music was on a radio play – his version of "Stand By Me". Fucking great voice, he had: he was lovely, but again, he had that side of him which could be quite cutting and come across quite nasty. But he was straight up and down – what you saw was what you got.

I can't imagine what their life must have been like. It must have been a nightmare. I can see why people go completely mad in this business. How they dealt with it – they couldn't go out. I suppose it makes you have to hang on to who you are: every day, you have to ask yourself, "Who the fuck am I?" We had a few years of screaming girls, but that was it.

20 HELP!

FROM THE BEATLES ALBUM *HELP!* (JULY 1965); RELEASED AS A SINGLE, JULY 1965. HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION: 1

An acknowledgement that entry into fame's hall of mirrors doesn't come for free, disguised as the perfect pop song.

Victor Spinetti, actor: Of all The Beatles, I saw John the most. We wrote a play together, *In His Own Write*. I remember working on it at my flat in London and John said: "Let's go somewhere warm." I thought he meant another room and we ended up in Marrakesh. He was one of the first songwriting poets. It sounds like I'm eulogising, but listen to his lyrics. Who else writes like that? It's a reservoir of poetry that's still here. He was misunderstood, too. When people listen to "Help!" and decide he was a troubled man, it's not true. He was saying, "I'm approaching 30 years of age. Is this it?" The pressure was on to be better and better. On the set of *Help!* I asked him: "Do you have lots of songs in a drawer that'll be discovered after you've gone?" And he said: "No, I just ring up Paul and say it's time we get together and write another hit." In that sense, he was an artist like Picasso, in saying, "I do not seek, I find." It was finding things and making something out of it that was the key. There was no ego with John. People always thought he was full of it, but he wasn't. He could be arrogant, but that's a different thing.

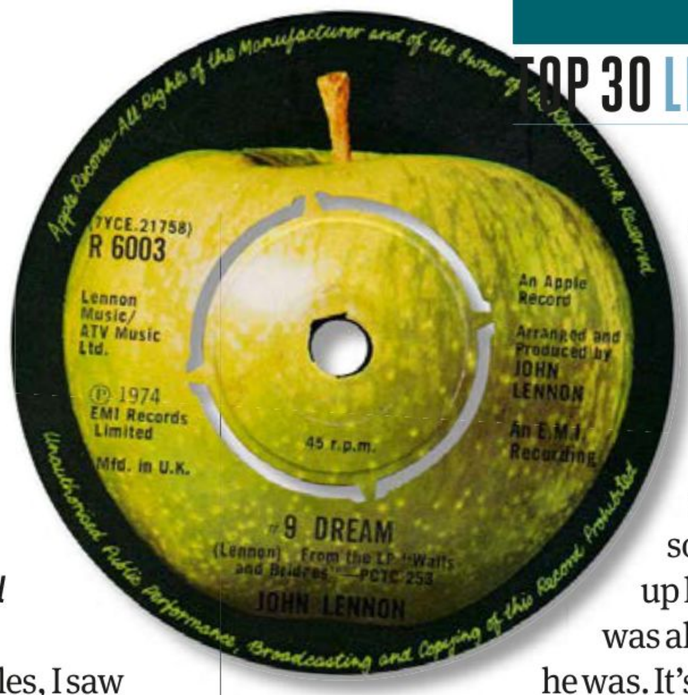
19 SHE SAID SHE SAID

FROM THE BEATLES ALBUM *REVOLVER* (AUGUST 1966)

Perfect, paranoid pop, inspired by Lennon's encounter with LSD convert Peter Fonda, who wrong-footed the Beatle at a party with the words: "I know what it's like to be dead".

John Cale There was always this competition between the Stones and The Beatles. Even though The Beatles could be brilliant, the Velvets would always side with the Stones, because they were darker, rougher. Then "She Said She Said" turned up and I could see The Beatles were changing. Lou [*Reed*] and I looked at each other and realised

John with actor Victor Spinetti during the filming of *Help!* in 1965



something was happening, which we zeroed in on. The way Lennon did it seemed so natural. It was obviously not just something he made up his mind to do, it was always part of who he was. It's got a very tricky time signature. He stops the beat at one point, which made me sit up. The mindset was so unusual – "*You're making me feel like I've never been born*". This is nihilism. What I liked about Lennon was his terseness. He could make a point very fast. I love that ability to be very piercing and savage. You get a physical sense of something from him. As soon as I saw him play, it was there, too. He used his entire body when he sang. By '66, The Beatles were a big deal, it was like a giant wave. We were in New York and every night on the radio there'd be Murray The K calling himself the fifth Beatle. People would hang on to every word.

18 DEAR PRUDENCE

FROM THE BEATLES ALBUM *THE BEATLES [THE WHITE ALBUM]* (NOVEMBER 1968)

Inspired by Lennon's efforts to coax Prudence Farrow from her shell while staying with the Maharishi, this is Lennon at his most warm-hearted.

Donovan: It has a particular connection to me because John wrote it while we were in India – the four Beatles, Mike Love, Paul Horn the jazz flutist and friends. We went in February 1968 to study Transcendental Meditation with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, which was a life-change for us all. All we took were acoustic guitars. George brought in tablas for Ringo. It was very much an unplugged situation in India. As I was acoustic all my life, I was playing guitar constantly, and John looked at me and said: "How do you do that guitar pickin'?" So I taught him. It's called the clawhammer. It was invented by Ma Carter in the Carter Family in the 1920s. She adapted a banjo style to guitar, and it changed folk music forever.

Prudence is Mia Farrow's sister. She had come to the ashram, as we all had, with various problems, and Maharishi kept her locked away in meditation for days on end. He was caring for her as she unfolded all her angst. But John felt: "Where is Prudence?" so he wrote this song. With the guitar style, and John's caring attitude to Prudence, it was touching.

17 HOW DO YOU SLEEP?

FROM THE JOHN LENNON ALBUM *IMAGINE* (SEPTEMBER 1971)

A scorching evisceration of Paul McCartney ("The only thing you done was yesterday/And since you've gone you're just another day") supported by some stinging slide-guitar from George Harrison.

Ian Hunter, Mott The Hoople: He's pissed off. He's always good at that. He could be bad-tempered at times, and that worked with his vocal, with the nostrils flaring. With "How Do You Sleep?", he had a cause – real or imaginary – and it adds to the performance.

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MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD/GETTY IMAGES

The lyric was maybe uncalled for, but he and Paul were having a do at the time. It pissed me off that people picked sides between them after The Beatles split. It's amazing those two wound up in a band. It was only a matter of time before they got fed up, because they weren't the same. Paul was always middle, John was very left.

It's a great song. Simple, which was John's strength. It has that great "Lennon sound". He wasn't keen on his voice, he double-tracked it and covered it with all kinds of shit, and that became very powerful. He wasn't willing to suffer fools either, and sometimes treated people not too well. A lot of guys were like that then. And John would let 'em have it. Which is an honesty you don't often see.

16 THE BALLAD OF JOHN AND YOKO

BEATLES SINGLE (MAY 1969). HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION: 1

"Christ, you know it ain't easy," sang Lennon, as he recounted life with Yoko, lived in the glare of the media spotlight.

Marianne Faithfull: I got to know Yoko through her exhibition at the Indica Gallery [*in November 1966*], through John Dunbar, the founding father of the British arts scene. I understood the attraction between John and Yoko. I could never see John happy being in Weybridge, in a normal bourgeois life. He was keen on The Beatles for a long time, maybe too keen in a way. He submerged himself too much, to the point where they were like one person. So John went in an extreme other direction. And Yoko was his way out. Nobody can imagine what it was like to be a Beatle. Then there's all that incredible baggage they each had.

I was fascinated by John and Yoko's bravery – living their life so publicly. But they managed very well. "The Ballad Of John And Yoko" is a brilliant summary of their life so far, as well as being a great tune. It all rushes by, which is just how their life must have seemed then.

I think John did manage to shake off The Beatles eventually, particularly with the Plastic Ono Band record. It's a sparse record, the opposite of what The Beatles were doing.

Yoko and I still keep in touch. I was invited to her tower of light ceremony [*the Imagine Peace Tower in October 2007*] in Reykjavik, which was very moving. It was fascinating because Yoko had a letter from John in which he said he'd seen the day when she would be able to do it. I love that.

15 WORKING CLASS HERO

FROM THE ALBUM, *JOHN LENNON: PLASTIC ONO BAND* (DECEMBER 1970)

Brutal dissection of class, fame and religion furiously delivered by Lennon, armed only with an acoustic guitar.

John Lydon: The Beatles were poisoned for me when I was young because my mum and dad played them all the time, so it would drill into my head like rusty nails. You know what I mean? "*She loves you, yeah yeah yeah*..." It's hard to get that stuff out of your head. I remember hearing "Working Class Hero" while I was in a pub with Malcolm McLaren, about 1975, when we were just starting the Sex Pistols. He took us across the road for one drink each – ah, so kind that man! – and "Working Class Hero" was on the jukebox. It stuck in my mind, because it was such a relevant and important record. I'd heard it beforehand, but then it didn't mean much. This time I related to it. The anger and the bitterness seemed utterly genuine, the words came out with such passion and violence. That was part of the building block for me, of songwriting in the Pistols. That you could shift into these larger aspects – class hatred, anger, resentment – and get it right.

14 A HARD DAY'S NIGHT

BEATLES SINGLE (JULY 1964). HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION: 1

2 mins 32 secs of pure, adrenalised pop, introduced by the most famous opening chord in pop history.

Roger McGuinn, The Byrds: When we got The Byrds together, we wanted to be a Mersey-type band. When we went to see the *Hard Day's Night* movie, it was a life-changing event. We took notes on what they were wearing and tried to emulate them as closely as we could. Once we'd met The Beatles, I realised we'd superimposed certain things on to them. We thought they were coming more from the bohemian side, but they were still very hip. We had a lot in common. We all did LSD, pot and amphetamines.

I thought Lennon was an incredible songwriter.

Fab two: Paul and John on the set of *Ready Steady Go!*

On "A Hard Day's Night", the arpeggio fade was really interesting, as well as that big opening chord. That song is a great indicator of what they were up to at that stage. Back then, hanging out with other bands was like being in a secret brotherhood. I remember George sending a tape of "If I Needed Someone" to tell me he got the idea from "The Bells Of Rhymney". I think Lennon got the idea for wearing the granny glasses from me. I saw him in London and he said, "What's with the shades?" I was wearing those little rectangular ones. I got the idea from John Sebastian. I saw him in the Village one night wearing them. He told me to try them on: "Look up at the street lights and move your head around. It's really groovy, man!"

13 POWER TO THE PEOPLE

JOHN LENNON/PLASTIC ONO BAND SINGLE (MARCH 1971). HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION: 7

Rousing sequel to "Revolution", sparked by an interview with Red Mole magazine in 1971. The rousing chorus was specifically designed to be sung for street demonstrations.

John Sinclair, ex-manager of the MC5: The first I knew of John was when he came down to Ann Arbor, Michigan, to play a concert to get me out of prison [*the Free John Now Rally on December 10, 1971*]. That was some first impression. Then my wife and I went to New York to say thank you. We sat around, smoked joints and shot the shit. He was a sweet guy, regular and down to earth. He was an intellectual. He wrote strange and twisted books and made movies. And John was a great composer. What more could you ask for? He saved my life. I loved the guy.

I admired his solo work. He had that jacket from The Beatles, which on the one hand made him fabulously wealthy but at the same time shrunk his mental world. I loved "Power To The People". This was something he believed in, and there was this whole concept of making records that expressed how he felt and he could get that over to millions of people. The impressive thing was that he was a rich guy trying to reach out to the other side and be one of the people. He was trying to figure out a way to be honest with himself. And that's what an artist does.

12 IMAGINE

FROM THE JOHN LENNON ALBUM, *IMAGINE* (SEPTEMBER 1971); RELEASED AS A SINGLE OCTOBER 1975. HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION: 1

Written in one morning, the lyric inspired by Yoko's 1964 book, Grapefruit, "Imagine" espoused a utopian dream after the gritty realism of Plastic Ono Band.

Peter Tork, The Monkees: Unlike McCartney, who retreated into domestic treacle, Lennon came at me, talking about – however naïvely – the world situation. He wanted to work on issues of world peace and international interaction. In other words, instead of writing the "fuck you, bitch" songs he might have written to be nasty, he started writing songs about "imagine" – just imagine, and war is over if you want it, the Bed-Ins, everything. He was interested in the political aspects of his behaviour. That was a stride forward, not a retreat.

Mick Jagger: My favourite Lennon song? "Imagine", I should think. It's the most catchy. There are many others, obviously, but that's one that I like.

Neil Young: I did "Imagine" for a benefit show, as I love that song. It's apparently religious but not in the way you think – because that's not always a good thing. You could say it's holy, but not Christian, and it tells the right story. A story that was right for those circumstances.

11 I AM THE WALRUS

FROM THE BEATLES EP "MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR" (DECEMBER 1967); RELEASED AS THE B-SIDE TO "HELLO GOODBYE", NOVEMBER 1967. HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION: 1

DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS

Lennon's most out-there composition, written after he learned pupils at his old school were studying his lyrics. "Let the fuckers work that one out," he apparently said.

Neil Innes, Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band/The Rutles: At the end of *Magical Mystery Tour*, we had this party where the Bonzos got up and did their bit. John dressed as a biker, with a leather jacket and Brylcreem-ed hair. When Larry [*"Legs" Smith*] came out wearing false breasts, John was shouting out, "C'mon Larry, we've all seen them already!" We ended up having a jam with The Beach Boys, who were also there, doing "Oh Carol", for 20 minutes.

"I Am The Walrus" is code for what The Beatles understood about one another, the rest was Lear-like fun. You have to admire that grinding, angry melody. Most people would have put that anger into some kind of shouting, but this is mean and driving.

I really didn't want to play John in *The Rutles*. It was daunting because he was sharp-tongued, quick and very funny. We forget the Bed-In was a satire of the advertising world. He wanted to make an advert for something as abstract as love. Everyone thought he was mad, but he wasn't. He was just another bloody art student!

Somebody apparently asked John what he thought of The Rutles, and he started singing "Cheese & Onions". "Questionnaire" was a tribute to John. That song was the only reason I went ahead with [*The Rutles' 1996 follow-up*] *Archaeology*. I'd been to see George about doing a second Rutles album and his dark humour immediately came to the fore: "More Rutles? Which one of you is going to get shot?" But he said we should go ahead and do it, because it was all part of the soup.

10 ACROSS THE UNIVERSE

FROM THE BEATLES ALBUM *LET IT BE* (MAY 1970)

"One of the best lyrics I've ever written," according to Lennon. Composed on a late-night songwriting roll, with added orchestra and celestial choir courtesy of producer Phil Spector.

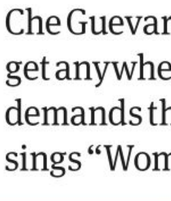
Brian Wilson: This had a great guitar sound. It flipped me out when I first heard it. And I thought his voice was especially good. He must have either taken some drugs or concentrated hard, because he got a very special vocal sound. The other thing was the lyrics. They were so heavenly [*sings the chorus*]. And they were most likely drug-inspired. I thought they were really great. People say the song reminds them of The Beach Boys, but not to me. It's unique.

> **"I thought his voice was especially good. He must have either taken some drugs or concentrated hard" Brian Wilson**

John and Yoko in 1971: "he's declaring her his muse!"

9 GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

PLASTIC ONO BAND SINGLE (JUNE 1969). HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION: 2



Cut during the Montreal Bed-In, the climactic shout-out to "Timmy Leary, Tommy Cooper, Allen Ginsberg, Hare Krishna" added a typically dry touch of humour to Lennon's call for world peace.

Julian Cope: As someone who loathes The Beatles, but realises that it's me who's out of step, I love Lennon's Plastic Ono Band period, when he was reinventing himself as an American countercultural icon. Liverpool shares a lot with Detroit, and around this time Lennon was at his most Detroit-informed. Look at his song titles – "Come Together" was borrowed from the MC5, as was "I Want You (She's So Heavy)". He wanted to do the Bed-In in Detroit, but they wouldn't let him so he had to do it on the other side of the Windsor Bridge, in Toronto.

He's often mocked around this period – all that Che Guevara posturing – but the only way you can get anywhere, politically, is by making ludicrous demands that are impossible to achieve. When he sings "Woman Is The Nigger Of The World", "Give Peace A Chance" or "Power To The People", a whole generation was having to think – if only briefly – of a new world paradigm, be it feminism, peace or revolutionary socialism. On top of that, he's taking a woman – not just any woman, but a Jap, the enemy! – and declaring her his muse. That, to me, gives him more kudos in heaven or hell or Valhalla or wherever he's gone, than anything else he did.

8 REVOLUTION

B-SIDE TO THE BEATLES SINGLE "HEY JUDE" (AUGUST 1968). HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION: 1

Inspired, perhaps, by the student riots in Paris, this loud, fuzz-heavy track featured Stones collaborator Nicky Hopkins on keyboards. A more subdued version appeared on The Beatles later that year.

Tommy Smothers, co-host of *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*: I first met John in 1968. Later, I played on "Give Peace A Chance". The funniest thing about recording it was that we were sitting playing and John stops, turns to me and says: "Tom, I don't like what you're playing. Just do exactly what I'm doing. That's the sound I want." I was doing D or G and putting a passing chord in here and there.

Harry Nilsson was a buddy of mine and he'd started hanging out with John. Because of the TV show, I had to be straight, but Harry and John were doing nose-blow and cognac. In 1970, my brother Dick and I were making the show in LA and Harry and John came and ripped into us,

CONTINUES OVER »

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

throwing stuff and yelling. They thought they were helping me! Next day, they sent me flowers. John never did things halfway.

Musically, "Revolution" was cool, but I loved the wordplay: "*solution... evolution... contribution... constitution*". But if John was around today and could see what's happening, he might have wished he had changed those lines: "*Don't you know it's gonna be all right?*"

Imagine no possessions... other than this quite extraordinary psychedelic Rolls-Royce

7 IN MY LIFE

FROM THE BEATLES ALBUM *RUBBER SOUL* (DECEMBER 1965)

Nostalgic, even in 1965, for a world he'd already left far behind, "In My Life" took on the form of a personal epitaph following Lennon's death.

Alex Turner, Arctic Monkeys: I've always loved that tune. It might be my mum and dad's favourite Beatles tune, too; it's got that harmonium solo, with George Martin playing. "Happiness Is A Warm Gun" is probably our favourite Beatles tune as a band. Do I prefer Lennon to McCartney? Yeah, that goes without saying. I was watching that *Gimme Some Truth* film the other day, when he's playing that tune that's supposed to be about McCartney, "How Do You Sleep?". He plays it on the piano to George Harrison and it's like he's *growling*. It's mad to look at that and think that's where it went. And they're talking about The Beatles around the table, taking the piss out of the whole thing, saying: "So have you seen any of The Beatles...?" "From one Beatle to another..." Probably to them it did get to be a joke. I bet they always took the piss out of it. It's like that with us; we already take the piss out of ourselves.

6 HAPPY XMAS (WAR IS OVER)

JOHN & YOKO/THE PLASTIC ONO BAND WITH THE HARLEM COMMUNITY CHOIR SINGLE (NOVEMBER 1972). HIGHEST CHART POSITION: 2

"Happy Xmas (War is Over)" inverts the usual pop bromide of the Christmas single, posing the question: "And what have you done?"

Yoko Ono: There's a funny story about "Happy Xmas (War Is Over)". We were writing it in a New York hotel over breakfast, and we'd just completed it. Then a call came from George [*Harrison*], who wanted him to perform in the Bangladesh concert and John said no. I think George wanted John to perform on his own, not with me, but John could not say that to me. He didn't want to hurt me. He said: "At the drop of a hat, you want to sing." I said: "I'd like to sing." John got so angry he didn't know what to do. He can't tell me about it. I said: "How dare you say no to a charity concert?" – not knowing the situation. By the time he and I made up, we'd forgotten about the song. And then it was getting very near to Christmas – "Oh, that song, we have to put it out because it's so important."

Allen Klein [*manager*] said: "It's too late." John was adamant and, of course, it did make it. We did it in New York City and the guy in the Record Plant, Roy Cicala, arranged all the kids from the choir to come in. When we made the song, John was saying, "This is going to replace 'White Christmas'." But it just disappeared. Now it's different. So I was thinking, 'John, do you see what's happening? You were right. This one really says it.' I think that people of our generation like this more [*than other Christmas perennials*] – it's something to hang on to.

5 YOU'VE GOT TO HIDE YOUR LOVE AWAY

FROM THE BEATLES ALBUM *HELP!* (AUGUST 1965)

Vulnerable, acoustic ballad – perhaps inspired by Bob Dylan's "I Don't Believe You..." – written and recorded in just two hours.

Ray Davies: When John got killed, I was doing the Palladium in New York a week or so later. I wanted to play this. I copped out as I couldn't rehearse it with The Kinks, and in those days I had to do everything with them. Me and Dave should've just got up and done it on acoustic guitars. John could be a cruel man. He was very hurtful to me once, early on. But this is my favourite song by him as it shows the vulnerability he felt he had to press down back then; the softness he had to hide.

4 ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

BEATLES SINGLE (JULY 1967). HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION: 1

The defining statement for a generation, famously beamed into homes around the globe through a live TV broadcast featuring many famous friends – including the Stones.

Billy Bragg: For John Lennon, it's pretty uncynical. He often leavened his political songs with a bit of cynicism, as was his way. But here he's talking about the one thing that typified his generation. Songs had previously only addressed love in relationship terms, and "All You Need Is Love"

KEYSTONE-FRANCE/GAMMA-RAPHO VIA GETTY IMAGES

suddenly takes on the status of a global movement. As with the greatest political songs, like "The Times They Are A-Changin'" or "Blowin' In The Wind", it doesn't offer a solution, so you can bring your own perspective to it. The political songs that endure are the most accessible to people, and this is incredibly accessible. "*There's no-one you can save that can't be saved*": that's a pretty powerful line to put in a love song.

That song showed me that the most commercial band of the '60s were able to reflect what was happening in the world, that pop music wasn't about escapism. After *Sgt Pepper* had blown everybody's mind, to come back in the Summer Of Love with that song and for it to be broadcast all around the world as the message from a generation – "*All you need is love*" – Lennon created the high-water mark of the '60s.

3 INSTANT KARMA!

JOHN LENNON SINGLE (FEBRUARY 1970). HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION: 5

Written, recorded and released in 10 days, "Instant Karma!" illustrated the volcanic rush of ideas experienced by the newly free Beatle. "We wrote it for breakfast, recorded it for lunch, and we're putting it out for dinner!" he announced.

Chris Frantz, Talking Heads/Tom Tom Club: I distinctly remember the first time I heard it, driving across the Highland Park Bridge in Pittsburgh, and this fantastic heavy drum sound came on the radio. I turned it up and thought, wow, this is cool and was surprised to hear Lennon's voice. I was a big fan of The Beatles, but I guess by that time they'd broken up and I was more interested in experimental stuff. I certainly wasn't looking to Beatles solo projects as a source of inspiration, but that track caught my attention.

I'm a sucker for the production, the shuffle beat of the drums, with plenty of gated reverb on the mics, and that echo on the vocal. The message of the lyric – emphasising a personal spiritual odyssey – is wonderful, but the appeal is more about the production, which I suppose was all Phil Spector's work. The song is so highly rhythmic and heavy.

2 YER BLUES

FROM THE BEATLES ALBUM *THE BEATLES* [*THE WHITE ALBUM*] (NOVEMBER 1968)

Taut, Dylan-referencing slice of dues-paying, sex'n'death blues – a fuck-you to the more purist critics.

Frank Black, Pixies: Someone in the British music press had commented that it was too bad The Beatles would never be able to tackle the blues. John Lennon was so incensed that he set about proving them wrong. "Yer Blues" has a lot of rhythm and blues moves, almost showbiz style. The tempo changes and even some of the guitar motifs are like that. There's one descending guitar line that's almost humorous, but it has a beautiful grit to it. But then to balance it out, the main guitar riff is just scary. Call me a stupid white guy, but that guitar line is as provocative as anything you're going to hear on a Howlin' Wolf record. It's totally legitimate. There's nothing white about it at all. It has so much attitude and confidence. It's almost like he's saying, "Yeah, I know I'm really bad. Get the fuck out of my way."

That combination of strength and swagger is what makes it so powerful, elevating it to the next level. The lyric is just beautiful, contemporary and modern. I mean, he references Bob Dylan in it. That line "*If I ain't dead already/Ooh girl you know the reason why*" is just so fucking bad. It's sexual, but references death at the same time. It just doesn't get any better than that.

Some years later, Ringo had a hit with a song that went "*Got to pay your dues if you wanna sing the blues*" ["It Don't Come Easy"] and "Yer Blues" is a perfect example of The Beatles doing that. When they played The Star-Club in Hamburg all those years before, four or five sets a night on speed, trying to keep drunk servicemen happy, that's where they really paid their dues. Some of those Star-Club recordings came out in the US as a double-live album and it was one of the first records I had as a kid. You hear it all in there. They were tough mutherfuckers.

1 STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER

BEATLES SINGLE (FEBRUARY 1967). HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION: 2

Written while on location in Spain (filming Richard Lester's How I Won The War), this stylised portrait of Lennon's youth remains British pop's most timeless moment.

Paul Weller: Lennon's a singer I admire for the honesty and power. I was listening to "Don't Let Me Down" and he was just letting go on that track. I love it. And songs like "Twist And Shout", "Money", Dizzy Miss Lizzy" and "Bad Boy" put him up there as one of the great rock'n'roll bawlers. They sound like he was gargling with razor blades before recording 'em. The flipside, of course, is songs like "Jealous Guy" and "Beautiful Boy" which show the more sensitive, soulful side to his voice. He's been a massive influence on me across the board... as a writer, lyricist and singer.

There are so many of Lennon's tracks I think are amazing, but when it comes down to it, "Strawberry Fields Forever" is my all-time favourite. I can still remember when I first heard it on the radio; I was only nine. I didn't know anything about drugs or psychedelia, I just knew it was a great, great tune.

I was already well into pop music. My mum was quite young and she was still buying records – so I'd already absorbed The Beatles and The Kinks, but that song just blew me away, it took me to a different place. I only had four teachers at school – John, Paul, George and Ringo – but you could say my education really started with "Strawberry Fields Forever". I got really into them after that. I was obsessed. We had relations in Chester, and one time I went on a pilgrimage to Liverpool with my dad. We went to Menlove Avenue, and Paul's house in Allerton, but we never made it to Strawberry Fields itself, sadly.

Technically, the production on "Strawberry Fields Forever" is phenomenal. There was no Pro-Tools – if you got it wrong you had to start again, it was as simple as that. For me, it's the first psychedelic record. People talk about "See My Friends" by The Kinks, but "Strawberry Fields Forever" is far more experimental. George Martin did a brilliant job editing together the two different sections; the key change in the middle is amazing. I still always return to it. It's one of those tracks where you still hear something new every time you hear it, it's got so many textures. For me it's still unsurpassed.

INTERVIEWS BY MICHAEL BONNER, CAROL CLERK, STEPHEN DALTON, NICK HASTED, ROB HUGHES, JOHN LEWIS, ALASTAIR McKAY, PAUL MOODY, TOM PINNOCK AND JOHN ROBINSON

A display of 'Bagism' before John & Yoko's appearance on the *Today* programme with Eamonn Andrews, April 1969

LENNON'S ON SALE AGAIN!

His solo singles discography, UK and US releases

GIVE PEACE A CHANCE/ REMEMBER LOVE

APPLE, JULY 1969

FORMAT: 7" UK: 2, US: 14

The first non-Beatles single from a Beatle – although the label credited The Plastic Ono Band. "Give Peace A Chance" was originally listed as a Lennon/McCartney composition, the credit being revised in the 1990s to reflect the fact that Paul had no involvement in the song's writing or recording. Including the Yoko-penned "Remember Love" on the flip was the earliest example of the one-side John, one-side Yoko marketing strategy.

COLD TURKEY / DON'T WORRY KYOKO (MUMMY'S ONLY LOOKING FOR HER HAND IN THE SNOW)

APPLE, OCTOBER 1969

FORMAT: 7" UK: 14, US: 30

Heroin-withdrawal anthem "Cold Turkey" was the first-ever Lennon song to be credited solely to him as a writer. It also gave Lennon his first experience of failing to crack the UK Top 2 with a new song since The Beatles' debut single, "Love Me Do" in 1962. This despite featuring Eric Clapton, Klaus Voormann and Ringo Starr on drums!

INSTANT KARMA! / WHO HAS SEEN THE WIND?

APPLE, FEBRUARY 1970

FORMAT: 7" UK: 5, US: 3

Instant indeed: this was written and recorded the same day (January 27, 1970) and in the shops by February 6. The run-off groove tells the listener to "Play Loud". "Play Soft" is the instruction for Yoko's B-side, its lyrics adapted from Victorian poet Christina Rossetti. The single was bumped out of the UK Top 5 when "Let It Be" hit the charts in March.

MOTHER / WHY

APPLE, DECEMBER 1970

FORMAT: 7" UK: N/A, US: 43

The primal scream therapy-period classic, and a paean to his dead mother Julia (and absent father Freddie), this US-only single was an edited version of the take on *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE / OPEN YOUR BOX

APPLE, MARCH 1971

FORMAT: 7" UK: 7, US: 11

Another populist anthem ("I make songs like broadsheets," he said). Issued in the US with a different Yoko B-side: "Touch Me".

IMAGINE / IT'S SO HARD

APPLE, OCTOBER 1971

FORMAT: 7" UK: 6 (1975 ISSUE) 1 (1980 ISSUE), US: 3

Lennon's most (in)famous song was initially only issued as a single in the US, and has a convoluted chart history in his native country. Released in the UK in 1975 as a trailer for the *Shaved Fish* compilation, it made No 6. It re-entered the charts in the wake of his death, holding No 1 for most of January 1981. It's charted again in the UK since, including 1988 (No 45), 1999 (No 3) and, in the download age, in 2007 (75) and 2012 (No 18).

HAPPY XMAS (WAR IS OVER) / LISTEN THE SNOW IS FALLING

APPLE, DECEMBER 1971/ NOVEMBER 1972

FORMAT: 7", UK: 4, US: N/A

Recorded in New York in October '71, Lennon's Yuletide perennial was initially only released in the US, a publishing dispute delaying its UK issue until the following year. Klaus Voormann was meant to play bass on the track but missed the session because of a flight delay. One of the other session guitarists filled in on bass, but who this was is unknown. Like "Imagine", this made the UK Top 10 following Lennon's murder, making No 3 in December 1980.

WOMAN IS THE NIGGER OF THE WORLD / SISTERS, OH SISTERS

APPLE, MAY 1972

FORMAT: 7" UK: N/A, US: 57

The controversial title – coined by Yoko during a magazine interview – meant this sole single from *Some Time In New York City* gave Lennon his first proper flop on both sides of the Atlantic.

MIND GAMES / MEAT CITY

APPLE, NOVEMBER 1973

FORMAT: 7" UK: 26, US: 18

Mind Games' title track was first written in 1969, during the *Let It Be* sessions. Originally titled "Make Love Not War", it was Lennon's first post-Beatles single without a Yoko B-side.

WHATEVER GETS YOU THRU THE NIGHT / BEEF JERKY

APPLE, OCTOBER 1974

FORMAT: 7", UK: 36, US: 1

The lead-off single from *Walls And Bridges*, and the one that brought him back. Elton John (keyboards, backing vocals) helped propel this to the top of the US charts, giving Lennon his first (and only) solo US No 1 in his lifetime.

BOB AYLOTT/KEYSTONE/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

#9 DREAM / WHAT YOU GOT

APPLE, JANUARY 1975

FORMAT: 7", UK: 23 US: 9

The connoisseur's favourite Lennon single, this elegant release – with backing vocals from May Pang – continued Lennon's near-obsession with the number 9, after his birthday (October 9) and numerous songs, including "Revolution #9" and "One After 9.09". And look where it peaked in the US...

STAND BY ME / MOVE OVER MS L

APPLE, MARCH 1975

FORMAT: 7"

UK 30, US: 20

The sole single from the fraught *Rock'N'Roll* was this passionate cover of the 1961 Ben E King favourite, written by King with Leiber & Stoller. "Move Over Ms L" had been dropped from the *Walls And Bridges* sessions, and as such was the first Lennon B-side not to be available on an LP.

(JUST LIKE) STARTING OVER / KISS KISS KISS

GEFFEN, OCTOBER 1980

FORMAT: 7", UK: 1, US: 1

His first single in five years, and the last in his lifetime. Chart historians note how his murder gave the single new life: in the UK it had peaked at No 8 in November and fallen to No 21 before Lennon's death propelled it to the top spot. In the US, the song rose from a high of No 3 in early December to No 1 the week after his death.

WOMAN / BEAUTIFUL BOYS

GEFFEN, JANUARY 1981

FORMAT: 7", UK: 1, US: 2

One of four UK Top 3 hits for Lennon in early 1981, along with "(Just Like) Starting Over" and the re-entries of "Imagine" and "Happy Xmas...".

WATCHING THE WHEELS / YES, I'M YOUR ANGEL

GEFFEN, MARCH 1981

FORMAT: 7" UK: 30, US: 10

The final *Double Fantasy* single. The picture sleeve photo was taken outside the Dakota by fan Paul Goresh, who also took the infamous shot of Lennon signing Mark Chapman's copy of the album, just five hours before the murder.

LOVE / GIMME SOME TRUTH

PARLOPHONE/GEFFEN, NOV 1982

FORMAT 7", UK: 41, US: N/A

A UK-only issue, and an edited version of the 1970 *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* song that trailed 1982 comp *The John Lennon Collection*. This 45 is again notable for its sleeve shot – the photo was taken by Annie Leibovitz on the day Lennon died.

NOBODY TOLD ME / O SANITY

POLYDOR, JANUARY 1984

FORMAT: 7", UK: 6, US: 5

The first 'unfinished' Lennon song to make a single, this lead-off from 1980 sessions release *Milk And Honey* is also notable, in the then-new MTV age, for its video: essentially a clipreel of old footage.

BORROWED TIME / YOUR HANDS

POLYDOR, MARCH 1984

FORMAT: 7"

UK: 32, US: 108

"*The future is brighter, and now is the time...*" Another *Milk And Honey* single, written on and inspired by an eventful sailing holiday in Bermuda in summer 1980. During a sea storm, illness and fatigue had incapacitated the crew, forcing a terrified Lennon to play hero and take the wheel of his yacht for hours. Lennon claimed that, as a former heroin addict, he was immune to seasickness.

I'M STEPPING OUT / SLEEPLESS NIGHT

POLYDOR, JULY 1984

FORMAT: 7"

UK: 88, US: 55

This final *Milk And Honey* single takes a tongue-in-cheek look at Lennon's house-husband period: "*Baby's sleeping... Ain't nothing on TV*".

EVERY MAN HAS A WOMAN WHO LOVES HIM / IT'S ALRIGHT

GEFFEN, NOVEMBER 1984

FORMAT: 7"

US/UK: N/A

A rather creative use of old material: Yoko's *Double Fantasy* tune is heavily redacted and rebranded as a Lennon song. Her vocal was wiped, and John's backing vocal pulled up in the mix. The flip features Yoko and Sean.

JEALOUS GUY / GOING DOWN ON LOVE

PARLOPHONE, NOV 1985

FORMAT: 7"

UK: 65, US: 80 (1988)

Oddly, the first single release for the *Imagine* favourite, and the most notable of a series of end-of-year Lennon single "hits" that includes "Imagine" (reissued in December 1988 and 1999) and "Happy Xmas...", which charted in 2003, 2007, 2008 and 2012.

"ON GUITAR, A VERY SPECIAL GUEST!"

LENNON'S EXTRA-CURRICULAR STUDIO WORK IN THE 1970s...

BILL ELLIOT AND THE ELASTIC OZ BAND
GOD SAVE US / DO THE OZ

APPLE, 1971

WRITER

John wrote and demoed this single for South Shields-bred Elliot. Originally titled "God Save Oz", it was hoped that the A-side would help raise funds and support for the underground magazine Oz, then in the midst of a long-running obscenity trial. Elliot simply dubbed his vocal over the existing backing track.

ELEPHANT'S MEMORY
ELEPHANT'S MEMORY

APPLE, 1972

PRODUCER, VOCALS, PERCUSSION, ELECTRIC PIANO, GUITAR

Appears on the former Plastic Ono Band members' tunes: "Cryin' Blacksheep Blues", "Chuck 'n' Bo", "Gypsy Wolf", "Wind Ridge", "Power Boogie", "Local Plastic Ono Band".

RINGO STARR
RINGO

APPLE, 1973

WRITER, PIANO, HARMONY VOCALS

Appears on "I'm The Greatest". Penned by Lennon, and featuring John, George and Ringo, "I'm The Greatest" marks the closest The Beatles ever came to a reunion. Paul McCartney, who also figured prominently in the *Ringo* sessions, was not in attendance.

HARRY NILSSON
PUSSY CATS

RCA VICTOR, 1974

PRODUCER

A 'Lost Weekend' special: while in LA, Lennon agreed to produce drinking buddy Harry Nilsson's 10th album, with the sessions moving to the East Coast when the attendant revelry proved too disruptive. During the sessions, Nilsson ruptured one of his vocal cords, and neglected to inform John.

RINGO STARR
GOODNIGHT VIENNA

APPLE, 1974

GUITAR, PIANO

Appears on "(It's All Da-Da-Down To) Goodnight Vienna", "All By Myself", "Only You (And You Alone)", "Goodnight Vienna (Reprise)".

ELTON JOHN
LUCY IN THE SKY WITH DIAMONDS / ONE DAY (AT A TIME)

DJM, 1974

BACKGROUND VOCALS, GUITAR

"Lucy In The Sky..." was one of three tracks Lennon would perform live onstage with Elton at Madison Square Garden. A single version of "I Saw Her Standing There", branded the "Elton John Band Featuring John Lennon And The Muscle Shoals Horns" charted at No 40 in the UK in March 1981.

DAVID BOWIE
YOUNG AMERICANS

RCA, 1975

BACKGROUND VOCALS, GUITAR

Appears on "Across The Universe" and "Fame". Lennon was dissatisfied with the original *Let It Be* version of "Across The Universe", eagerly accepting Bowie's offer to do it justice.

DAVID BOWIE
FAME / RIGHT

RCA, 1975

BACKGROUND VOCALS, GUITAR

Lennon received a share of the songwriting credit for his contribution to new pal Bowie's first US No 1. The song reached No 17 in the UK.

RINGO STARR
RINGO'S ROTOGRAVURE

POLYDOR, 1976

PIANO

John contributes piano to his own "Cookin' (In The Kitchen Of Love)", his last recording until the *Double Fantasy* sessions.

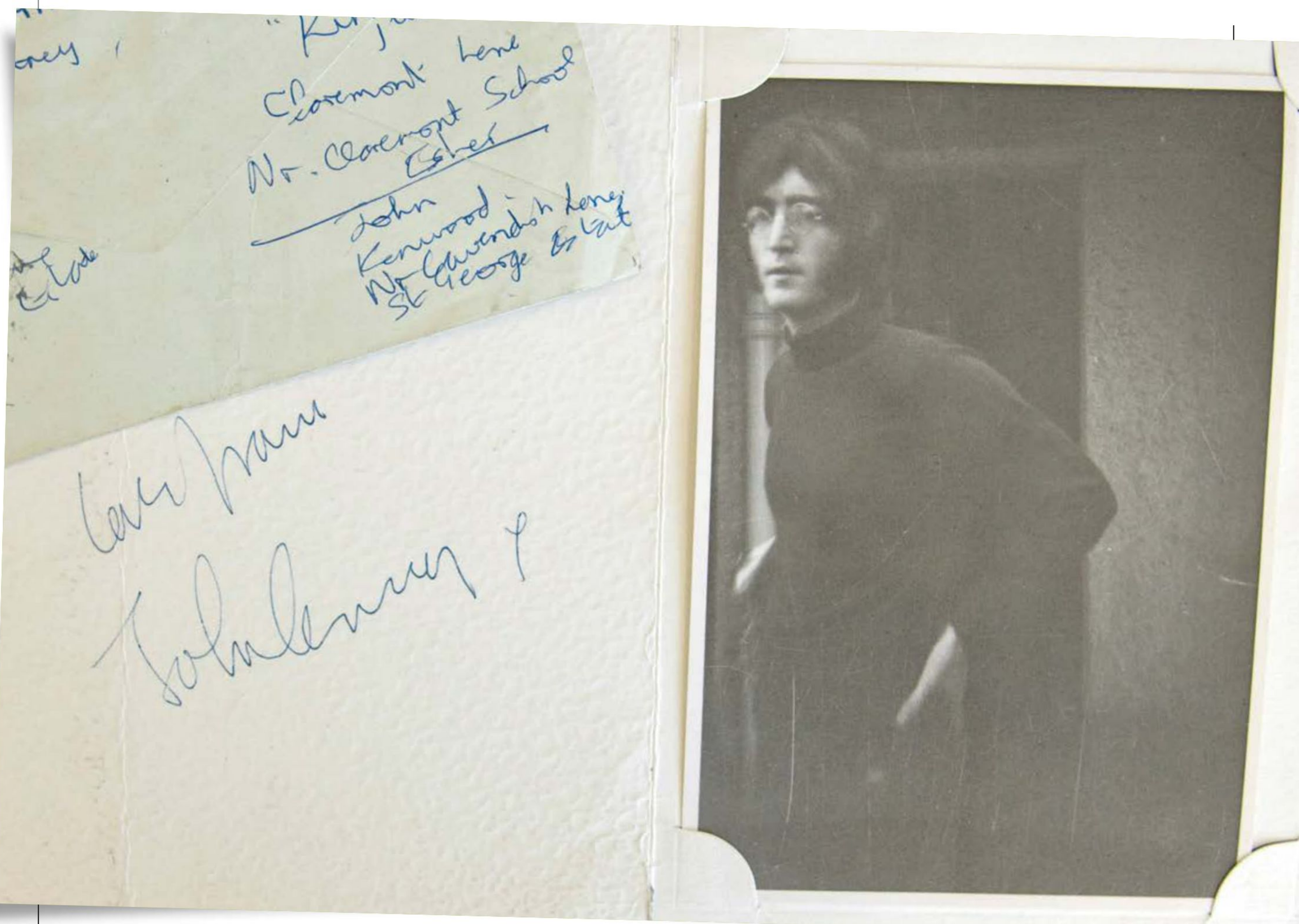
MICK JAGGER
THE VERY BEST OF MICK JAGGER

RHINO, 2007

PRODUCER, GUITAR

Lennon appears on "Too Many Cooks (Spoil The Soup)". Originally recorded circa 1973, and cut at the Record Plant West, the master was reportedly discovered stashed under the bed of May Pang. Jagger himself has admitted that he forgot the recording of the blues standard even existed. An unlabelled acetate surfaced at the Cooper Owen auction house in 2003.

CONTINUES OVER »



DREAMIN' OF THE PAST

Lennon collections, anthologies and retrospectives

SHAVED FISH

APPLE, OCTOBER 1975

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK: 5, US: 12

The first-ever Lennon Best Of, compiled by the man himself, was initially released with heavily edited versions of some tracks (see particularly "Give Peace A Chance" and "Woman Is The Nigger Of The World"). The collection included all the singles Lennon released as a solo artist with the exception of "Stand By Me" and came two weeks after the birth of his son Sean. Still a second-hand record shop staple.

THE JOHN LENNON COLLECTION

PARLOPHONE/GEFFEN, NOVEMBER 1982

UK: 1, US: 33

The first of many posthumous Lennon compilations was originally distributed by Geffen in the US, but it was reissued by EMI in 1989 after the label acquired the distribution rights to *Double Fantasy* (all of Lennon's tracks off the album save one are included). Bonus track "Move Over Ms L" was originally the B-side to "Stand By Me" and was the only officially released Lennon track that was previously unavailable on any UK album.

MENLOVE AVE

PARLOPHONE/EMI, NOVEMBER 1986

UK: N/A, US: 127

This Yoko-supervised release features recordings from rehearsals for *Walls And Bridges* as well as outtakes from the *Rock'N'Roll* sessions. The name refers to Lennon's childhood home and the artwork features a portrait of the artist rendered by Andy Warhol in 1980, only months before Lennon's death. The album failed to chart in the UK and did little better in the US, making it Lennon's least successful charting album at the time.

IMAGINE: JOHN LENNON

PARLOPHONE/EMI, OCTOBER 1988

UK 64, US 31

The soundtrack for the 1988 documentary film includes tracks from the entire span of Lennon's career through The Beatles and his solo work. It also has previously unreleased tracks with an acoustic demo of "Real Love" from 1979, a rehearsal version of "Imagine" (taped shortly before the final version in mid-1971), and a clean-intro version of "A Day In The Life".

LENNON

PARLOPHONE/EMI, OCTOBER 1990

UK: N/A, US: N/A

The four-CD boxset was compiled by Beatles expert Mark Lewisohn and looked extensively at Lennon's solo career from *Live Peace In Toronto* to *Menlove Ave*. The collection never charted in Britain or the United States and was later deleted from Lennon's catalogue.

LENNON LEGEND: THE VERY BEST OF JOHN LENNON

PARLOPHONE/EMI, OCTOBER 1997 (UK); FEBRUARY 1998 (US)

UK: 3, US: 65

The compilation was released to replace the deleted *Lennon* collection. It was the first official Lennon Best Of to include material from *Milk And Honey* and is still considered the definitive single-disc compilation of Lennon's catalogue. It also includes the US single-edit of "Mother" which was previously unavailable on CD.

BOURNEMOUTH NEWS & PIC SERVICE/SHUTTERSTOCK

JOHN LENNON ANTHOLOGY

CAPITOL/EMI, NOVEMBER 1998

UK: 62, US: 99

See pages 110-113.

WONSAPONATIME

CAPITOL/EMI, NOVEMBER 1998

UK: 76; US: N/A

The single-disc collection serves as a distillation of the demos, studio session outtakes, and other previously unreleased material that was contained on the *John Lennon Anthology* boxset. Opener "I'm Losing You" is the alternate/demo version, featuring Cheap Trick as the backing band.

ACOUSTIC

CAPITOL/EMI, NOVEMBER 2004

UK: N/A, US: 31

This collection of live performances, demos and studio outtakes was mostly already released, with nine of the 16 tracks coming from the *Anthology*. However, this ragbag collection also marked the first official release of material that had long been available only as bootlegs.

WORKING CLASS HERO: THE DEFINITIVE LENNON

PARLOPHONE/CAPITOL /EMI, OCTOBER 2005

UK: 11, US: 135

Branded as a collection of remixed and remastered tracks from Lennon's concurrently reissued solo albums, this compilation was released to commemorate what would have been Lennon's 65th birthday. The collection enjoyed minor chart success over two previous Greatest Hits-style compilations – 2001's *Instant Karma: All Time Greatest Hits* and 2005's *Peace, Love And Truth* (released only in Australian and Asian markets). Both offered straightforward selections, and no previously unreleased material.

THE US VS JOHN LENNON

PARLOPHONE/CAPITOL /EMI, SEPTEMBER 2006

UK: N/A, US: N/A

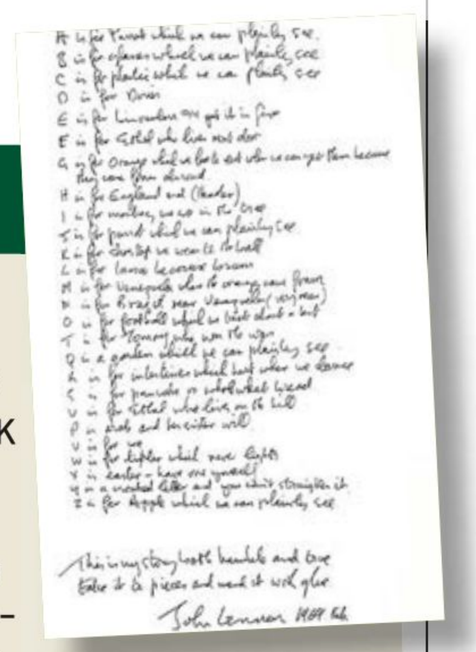
The soundtrack to the acclaimed documentary film included two previously unreleased tracks alongside Lennon's celebrated hits. The special tracks included a live performance **CONTINUES OVER »**

IMAGINE SOME POSSESSIONS…

COLLECTING JOHN LENNON MEMORABILIA

A MACABRE STORY FROM summer 2016: A plain white dress shirt, worn by Dakota Building concierge Jay Hastings the night Lennon was shot, sold at auction for £31,000. The shirt was stained with spots of Lennon's blood – and that alone explains the extraordinary price-tag. "We did ask ourselves, 'Is this too dark or wrong to sell?'" offered Garry Shrum, from auctioneers Heritage Auctions. "But I don't think it is… it's a piece of history."

Wherever you stand morally, this story tells you all you need to know about the market for Lennon gear. Things that were touched, worn (or bled on) by the man are highly prized. Autographed albums, artwork, photos – these are the holy grails for a Lennon collector. Famously, George Michael paid £1.45m for the white piano on which Lennon composed "Imagine". Infamously, the copy of *Double Fantasy* that Lennon signed for his killer Mark David Chapman was put up for sale for $525,000 in 2003. In December 2019, a (broken) pair of Lennon's iconic round sunglasses, left in the back of Ringo's limo in 1968, sold at Sotheby's for £137,500. The guide price had been just eight grand.



Provenance – an item's undisputed authenticity – is always they key, and collectors will pay for the proof. As chauffeur Alan Herring explained in a note to accompany the Sotheby shades: "When John got out of the car I noticed one lens and one arm had become disconnected. I asked John if he'd like me to get them fixed. He told me not to worry, they were just for the look."

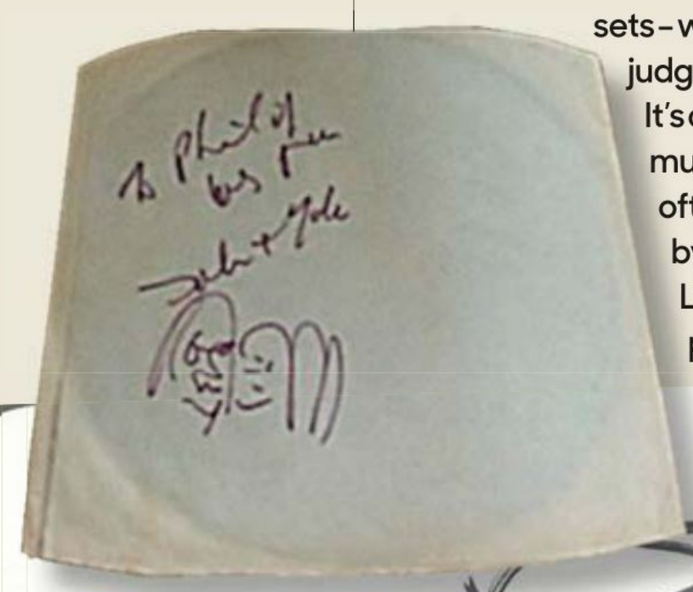
A Lennon imprimatur adds value, undisputedly. *Unfinished Music No 2…*, signed "To Philip Best Wishes John And Yoko", and decorated by a Lennon doodle, made £2,050 in 2015. In summer 2019, a first press stereo 'White Album', with the authenticated scrawl "Happy Xmas Nigel", hit $6400.

But if – like most of us – your Lennon collection is centred around standard issues of the vinyl, then the prices aren't so steep. Most of Lennon's 1970s output sold well and is still widely available. You really shouldn't pay more than £15 for an excellent copy of the UK *Walls And Bridges*, with its cute flip sleeve and insert. *Mind Games* should cost you roughly similar, maybe more – although in this current vinyl boom, some sellers are listing that at £50 and up. (Some dude on collector site Discogs is asking for £30 *without the freaking cover*, which is just insanity.)

Elsewhere, we've seen superb copies of *Plastic Ono Band* top out near £100, though £40 is still more sensible for a nice-condition copy. Near-mint standard UK pressings of the earlier 'experimental' Apple releases – *Two Virgins* or *Life With The Lions* (on Zapple) – are now being listed in Discogs at the £100 mark.

The most desirable collectables are always the oddities – an unreleased UK test-pressing of "Woman Is The Nigger Of The World"/"Sisters, O Sisters", sold for £2,500 in 2017, while a genuine Apple acetate will change hands for around £500. The white-label 1974 EMI demo "Whatever Gets You Thru The Night", backed by an interview with Bob Mercer ("And A Message To The Salesmen") is another sought-after item. This proves the value-in-rarity rule: only 99 copies were pressed, and a copy sold for £995 in summer 2020.

Lennon's sheer celebrity means that his appeal transcends mere record collectors. The so-called Bag One artwork – 14 Lennon-drawn, erotic lithographs, originally conceived as a wedding present for Yoko in 1969 and limited to 300 numbered sets – will set you back at least $60,000, judging by the last auction figures. It's one of those hyper-serious museum-grade items that are often bought to accrue value by high net-worth individuals. Less a souvenir, more a high-performing investment.



of "Attica State", from the 1971 John Sinclair Freedom Rally in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and an instrumental version of "How Do You Sleep?". The liner notes were written by Yoko.

REMEMBER

EMI/STARBUCKS, 2006

UK:N/A, US:N/A

A souvenir from the days Starbucks sold CDs with your skinny mocha. *Remember* was part of their *Hear Music* series, and another root-and-branch overview of the man's solo career, lifted by six selections from *Anthology*, including "Going Down On Love".

SIGNATURE BOX/ GIMME SOME TRUTH/ POWER TO THE PEOPLE: THE HITS

EMI, OCTOBER 2010

UK:N/A, US:N/A

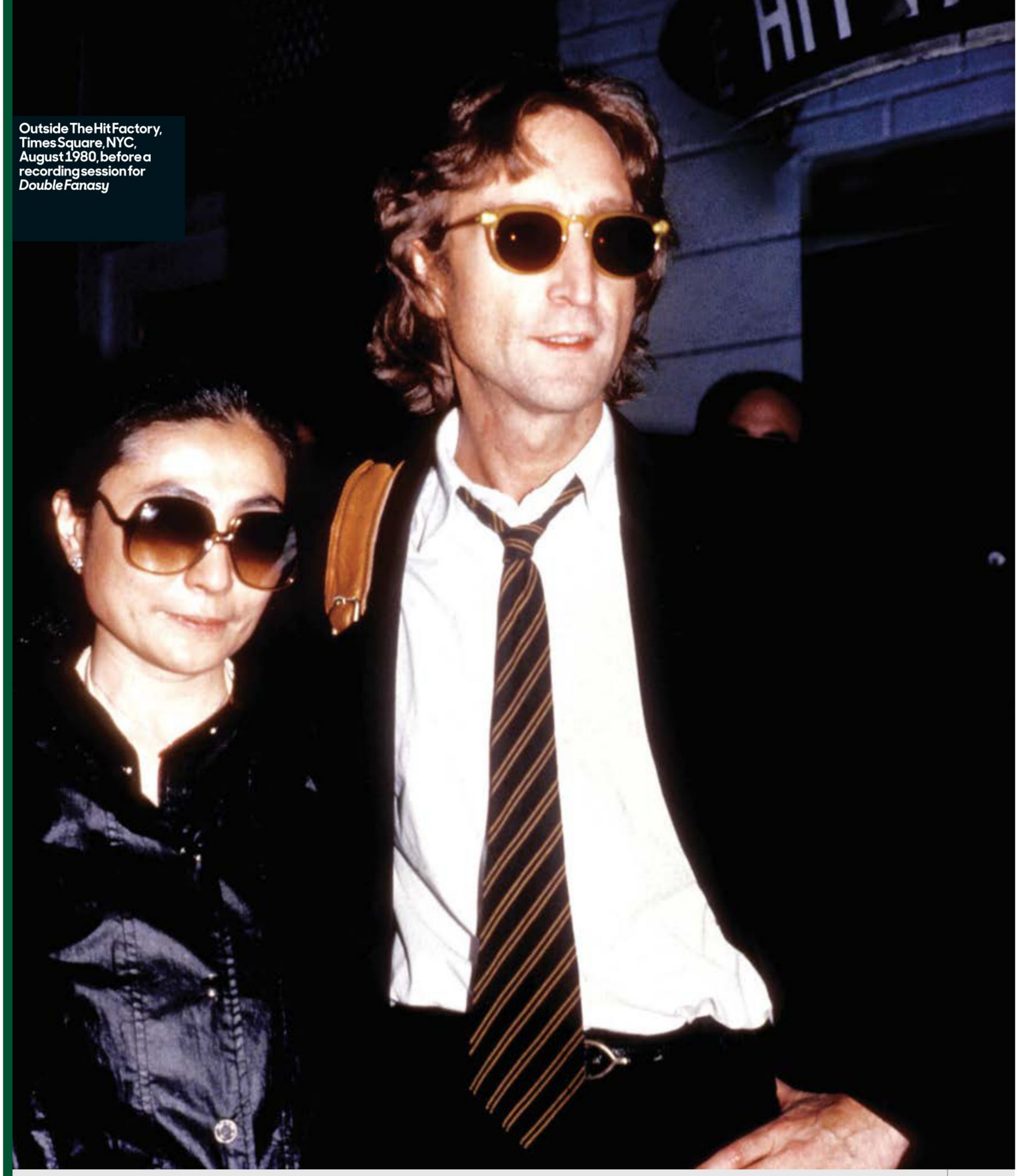
What would have been John's 70th birthday was celebrated with a trio of beautifully remastered releases on vinyl and CD – with improved audio quality the key differentiator. *Signature Box* was the gold standard, an artfully packaged set of eight albums, plus additional discs of singles and home tapes, and a 60-page hardback book. Available for around £50, it was a great-sounding bargain, although *Rock'n'Roll* is still pretty far from audiophile. *Gimme Some Truth* offered a four-disc, thematically arranged compilation of Lennon post 1970. *Power To The People* was the entry-level purchase, a decent, if wholly predictable 15-track best-of, while an additional 'experience' edition added a 15-track DVD of videos for all songs.

ICON

UMC, SEPTEMBER 2014

UK:N/A, US:N/A

Universal's budget *Icon* series offers easy-access primers to a bewildering range of artists from Billy Idol to The Beach Boys, Public Enemy to Pavarotti, Sinatra to Insane Clown Posse. The Lennon issue is, understandably, an unashamed recycling of 11 best-known cuts, just in case you haven't got "Imagine", "Love" or "Beautiful Boy" anywhere else. One for the car, perhaps, if you've still got a CD player.



Outside The Hit Factory, Times Square, NYC, August 1980, before a recording session for *Double Fanasy*

A BEATLE WITHOUT A RECORDING DEAL!

Why did John Lennon sign for Geffen Records?

ASTONISHING TO THINK, but from 1976 to 1980, not only did John Lennon not release any albums, he didn't even have a contract – his EMI/Capitol deal having been allowed to expire. So when Lennon emerged from house-husband hibernation to begin sessions for *Double Fantasy* in summer 1980, the labels started circling.

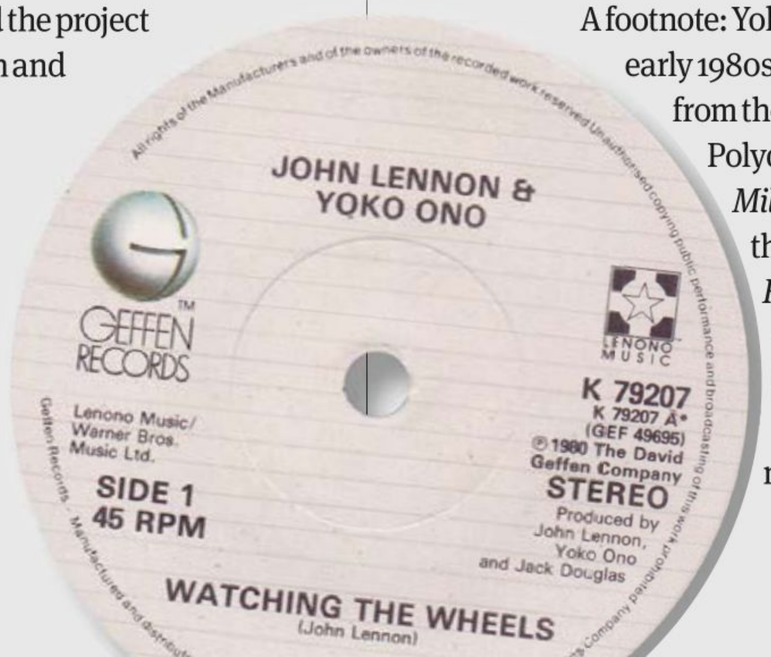
According to biographer Albert Goldman, heavyweights Columbia and Atlantic/Warner were keen, apparently offering big money bids for the new songs – only to withdraw them when they found the project was to be a 50/50 split between John and Yoko material.

Cue David Geffen, the former Asylum Records head, who was himself returning to the music industry after a five-year dalliance with Hollywood. At the time, his new own-brand label had just one artiste: Donna Summer. So when Geffen dropped in on Lennon sessions at The Hit Factory studios in New York in late September to discover he was in with a chance of signing a Beatle, he was more than happy to agree to the couple's terms.

Matters moved quickly: Geffen Records announced the signing ecstatically to the press in early October, marking plans to release a single within a month ("(Just Like) Starting Over"), an album within two months (*Double Fantasy*), and a world tour, which was intended to take place in early 1981. They honoured the first two promises.

A footnote: Yoko and Geffen fell out in the early 1980s. Yoko took the unused tracks from the *Double Fantasy* sessions to Polydor instead, issuing them as *Milk And Honey* in 1984. But by then, with sales of *Double Fantasy* moving past three million in the US alone, Geffen had no major cause for regret.

The rights to the album are now owned by EMI.



VINNIE ZUFFANTE/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

OH YOKO

Hard rock! Avant-jazz! New wave! And an awful lot of John! Your handy guide to Mrs Lennon's solo stuff…

YOKO ONO/ PLASTIC ONO BAND

APPLE, DECEMBER 1970

UK: N/A, US: 182

This, Ono's first solo album, was recorded at the same time, with the same musicians and production team, and released the same day as *John Lennon/ Plastic Ono Band*. The sleeve is essentially identical, too, leading to suspicion of a marketing ploy to trick buyers into mistaking Ono's record for Lennon's.

FLY

APPLE, MARCH 1971 **UK: N/A, US: 199**

Toilets flushing, tribal drums and chugging pub rock: this double found Mrs L on peerlessly avant-garde form and includes "Don't Worry Kyoko (Mummy's Only Looking For Her Hand In The Snow)" and the 10-minute "Airmale", which was used to soundtrack Lennon's film *Erection*. From 1968, "AOS" pre-dated the rest of the set and featured avant-garde jazzer Ornette Coleman.

APPROXIMATELY INFINITE UNIVERSE

APPLE, JAN/FEB 1972

UK: N/A, US: 193

On this double, Ono switched her trademark yowling for a more melodic vocal style. Key tracks include "Yang Yang" and "I Want My Love To Rest Tonight" with a guest vocal by you-know-who. Like all her '70s output, John is credited as producer, here under the *nom de plume* Joel Nohnn.

FEELING THE SPACE

APPLE, NOVEMBER 1973 **UK/US: N/A**

The title hinted at a staunchly feminist independence, and the songs ("Angry Young Woman", "Woman Power", "She Hits Back") confirmed it. "Men, Men, Men" offers a characteristically wry Yoko moment: "*Honey juice, you can come out of the box now,*" she coos. "*Yes, dear*", a bespectacled former Beatle pipes back. The artwork parodied the sexism of men's magazines, listing the band's vital statistics and even offering their phone numbers for a fee (though not John's – listed as "John O'Cean'", he is "not for sale").

SEASON OF GLASS

GEFFEN, JUNE 1981 **UK: N/A, US: 49**

By some distance her biggest LP, this was released less than six months after John's murder and produced with Phil Spector. The cover featured Lennon's actual bloodstained glasses, and one track ("No, No, No") begins with four gunshots and Ono screaming. "Walking On Thin Ice", Ono's most famous song from this period, and the track Lennon contributed to in his final hours, was included in the 1997 reissue.

IT'S ALRIGHT (I SEE RAINBOWS)

POLYGRAM, NOV 1982 **UK: N/A, US: 98**

With track titles such as "My Man", "Never Say Goodbye" and "Let The Tears Dry", Ono's first flirtations with new wave and production is heavily marked by her continued attempts at coming to terms with Lennon's passing.

STARPEACE

POLYGRAM, 1985 **UK/US: N/A**

This concept album found Ono railing against then-president Ronald Regan's missile defence system. The album also contains the minor dance hit "Hell In Paradise" and a 1997 reissue included a live version of "Imagine" recorded during the 1986 tour in support of the album.

NEW YORK ROCK

CAPITOL, MAY 1994 **UK/US: N/A**

New York Rock was a musical written by Yoko Ono as an autobiographical account based on her life with John Lennon. This soundtrack included many songs from Ono's back catalogue as well as a number of new tracks that would make it onto subsequent LPs.

RISING

CAPITOL, JULY 1995 **UK/US: N/A**

Ono returned to more shrill forms of expression on *Rising*, her first solo record in 10 years, backed by a trio called IMA (Japanese for 'Now'), of which a teenaged Sean Lennon was a member.

A STORY

RYKODISC, JULY 1997 **UK/US: N/A**

Although recorded during 1974's 'Lost Weekend', *A Story* did not see release until 1992's Rykodisc career retrospective *Onobox*. It was only released as a standalone in 1997 along with the reissue of Ono's back catalogue.

BLUEPRINT FOR A SUNRISE

CAPITOL, NOV 2001 **UK/US: N/A**

In addition to featuring live recordings and new tracks, this consists in large part of sampling, remixes and unreleased material from Ono's solo back catalogue.

YES, I'M A WITCH / OPEN YOUR BOX

ASTRALWERKS/APPLE, 2007

UK/US: N/A

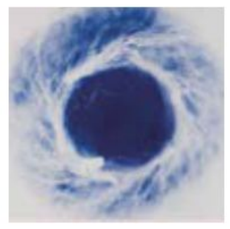
The former (nice title!) is an album of remixes/covers of Ono's catalogue by other artists, including Peaches, The Flaming Lips and Cat Power. The latter is a follow-up dance remix compilation by Ono herself, which includes the unlikely DJ Dan remix of "Give Peace A Chance". *Yes I'm A Witch Too* – featuring remixes from the likes of Death Cab For Cutie, Moby and Sparks – followed in early 2016.

BETWEEN MY HEAD AND THE SKY

CHIMERA MUSIC, SEPTEMBER 2009

UK/US: N/A

Credited to the Yoko Ono Plastic Ono Band, this is a neat summation of Yoko's solo excursions. It moves from primal blues wailing to post-electro to minimalism, winding it all up with the simple statement: "*It's me, I'm alive*".



YOKOKIMTHURSTON

CHIMERA MUSIC, SEPTEMBER 2012

UK/US: N/A

Another collaborative effort, another great title, this features six questing songs co-composed with Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon and Thurston Moore. Reviews oscillated between fawning praise ("intrinsically and unaccountably right") and dismissive ("less primal scream. More yawn").

TAKE ME TO THE LAND OF HELL

CHIMERA MUSIC, SEPTEMBER 2013

UK/US: N/A

Produced, as with other reformed Plastic Ono band efforts, by Sean Lennon, this release has a guestlist as eclectic as the music within, as Cornelius, tUnE-yArDs, Questlove, Ad-Rock & Mike D and Lenny Kravitz bring their chops. Genre-blurring, madly enjoyable, and kicking with energy, it may be her best.

WARZONE

SONY, 2018 **UK/US: N/A**

50 years as a performer and still no compromise. Unmellowed by the years, this remade 13 tracks (many from her *Starpeace* album of 1983) from across Yoko's career under the guidance of producer Thomas Bartlett. Includes a version of "Imagine", now credited not just to John Lennon but also – some might say questionably – to Yoko. ***Mark Bentley***

Yoko at her 1/2 Life Exhibition in London, May 19, 1967

KEYSTONE PRESS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Stop me

if you've heard this one before

FEBRUARY 1970: Just another hook-up with 'Johnny Rhythm' for ROY CARR...

IT'S MADNESS AS usual when I arrive at The Beatles' Apple Corp HQ in Savile Row to see my old friend Derek Taylor. When I first meet him, years earlier, Derek's a journalist on the *Liverpool Daily Post And Echo*. He goes on to become friends with The Beatles, working first as an assistant to their manager, Brian Epstein, then as their PR. In 1964, he tours America with them and stays when they come back. In Los Angeles, he works with The Byrds and a few years after that helps organise the Monterey Pop Festival. He's back in London now, working for The Beatles again, as press officer for Apple.

As ever, the reception area of the Apple building is full of people I don't know, whose only talent as far as I can see is coming up with ingenious ways of spending The Beatles' fortune, which about now is fast disappearing. There's also a receptionist whose name I'm not sure I ever know, but who every time I come here is weeping and complaining about the headache her third eye has given her.

I head for Derek's office, which is a civilised retreat, a haven of sanity in the general mayhem of a typical day in this building. Derek is as usual dressed to dapper perfection in a white suit that makes him look like someone out of the pages of a novel by Somerset Maugham or Graham Greene involving heavy drinking and moral crises in the tropics. Derek when I get to his office is sitting regally on the kind of wicker throne that like many things that have been popular in the '60s is about to go out of fashion in a hurry. He's talking to someone who turns out to be John Lennon, newly returned with Yoko Ono from a family visit to Aalborg in northern Denmark, where he's evidently left most of his hair since he's sporting a somewhat savage crew cut. He and Yoko have a new look, too – beatnik roll necks and denim replacing the matching white suits that had become so familiar. He also has a new single, "Instant Karma!", just out.

I've known John for longer than I've been friends with Derek. We meet first at the bar of The Cavern, in Liverpool, where The Beatles have just played a lunchtime show. I've got my own band at the time, The Executives, and we've heard a lot about The Beatles from other groups on the northern club circuit, but I hadn't seen them until recently, when they played The Iron Door, a hole-in-the-wall club in Liverpool.

They're still in their Hamburg leathers and very loud. John spends most of the set with a cigarette in his mouth, shouting at the audience, most of whom he seems to know by name. At the bar of The Cavern, where we speak for the first time, he strikes me as a typically mouthy Scouser, incredibly self-confident. If there's a girl he fancies, he just start chatting her up, whispers something in her ear that either makes her laugh or flounce off in a huff.

We keep in touch after this. The Executives are signed to EMI, so sometimes I see John or Paul at the record company offices. More often, I run into them at places like The Cromwellian, The Scotch of St James or The Speakeasy, musicians' hang-outs, where they're getting mashed. In September 1969, I'm in Toronto, working for the promoters of the

> "Carbolic and piss," says John. "That's a smell I remember. Reminds me of Shea Stadium..."

Toronto Rock And Roll Revival Festival. They've booked Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis, Alice Cooper and The Doors, but aren't selling any tickets. One of the promoters somehow gets hold of Lennon's number and calls him and says, "If we pay your air fare, will you come over and be the MC for the show?" And Lennon says, "Yeah, I'll come but I want to play. I'll bring a band." And he does, turning up with Yoko, Eric Clapton, Alan White and Klaus Voormann. They're met at the airport by loads of bikers who become their outriders, and drive straight to the stadium where the gig's being held. I meet them backstage in the locker room where they're wondering where they can score some coke. John takes a deep breath.

"Carbolic and piss," he says. "That's a smell I remember," he says. "It reminds me of Shea Stadium..."

Jim Morrison drops by, open-mouthed at the sight of a Beatle, totally overawed. Clapton, meanwhile, is completely off his face and I don't think John is far behind. They play and are quickly gone and not quite six months later, here we are at Apple HQ and John is telling me about 'Year One', the most recent episode in the series of ongoing events to promote world peace that had started the year before with the bed-ins in Amsterdam and Montreal, where they'd recorded "Give Peace A Chance".

"I'm not so arrogant that I think you can cure all the world's ills with a song," he's telling me now. "And we're not preaching. We're just telling it how it is. Dylan does it his way. Phil Ochs does it his way. Curtis Mayfield does it another way, so does James Brown, Woody Guthrie's kid, Arlo, Edwin Starr, Country Joe and dozens of others. And then there's me and Yoko doing it our particular way.

"I know some people think we're only interested in self-promotion, but they can think whatever they want. Whether it's bed-ins, bagism, or me returning my MBE as a protest, what Yoko and I are actually promoting is not so much ourselves as the message, that this is the start of a new era – Year One, and the pursuit of world peace."

Not long after this, I join the staff of the *NME*. I'm in New York three or four times a year and we usually meet up. I put him in touch with people with Beatles memorabilia, because he's started his own collection. He calls from time to time and says, "I'm looking for a Beatles lunch pail," or something and I find someone who has one. There's a number in New York I'm given that I can call him on. I usually leave a message and he calls back, usually giving his name as Johnny Rhythm. Once, I'm in Las Vegas to interview Elvis Presley, which turns out to be a fucking merry-go-round, and I call the New York number and he picks up the phone. We start chatting and he says, "I'm doing a show at Madison Square Garden, do you want a ticket?" "Are you going to be any good?" I ask.

The last time I see him is at the Dakota. He's sitting on the floor, peeling a big bowl of potatoes. Sean is crawling all over him. He looks like he's found what he's always wanted, which is to lead a normal life. Two years later, he's dead.

Roy Carr

ANTHONY COX/KEYSTONE/GETTY IMAGES

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